COUNT BRASS BY MICHAEL MOORCOCK

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August 1975

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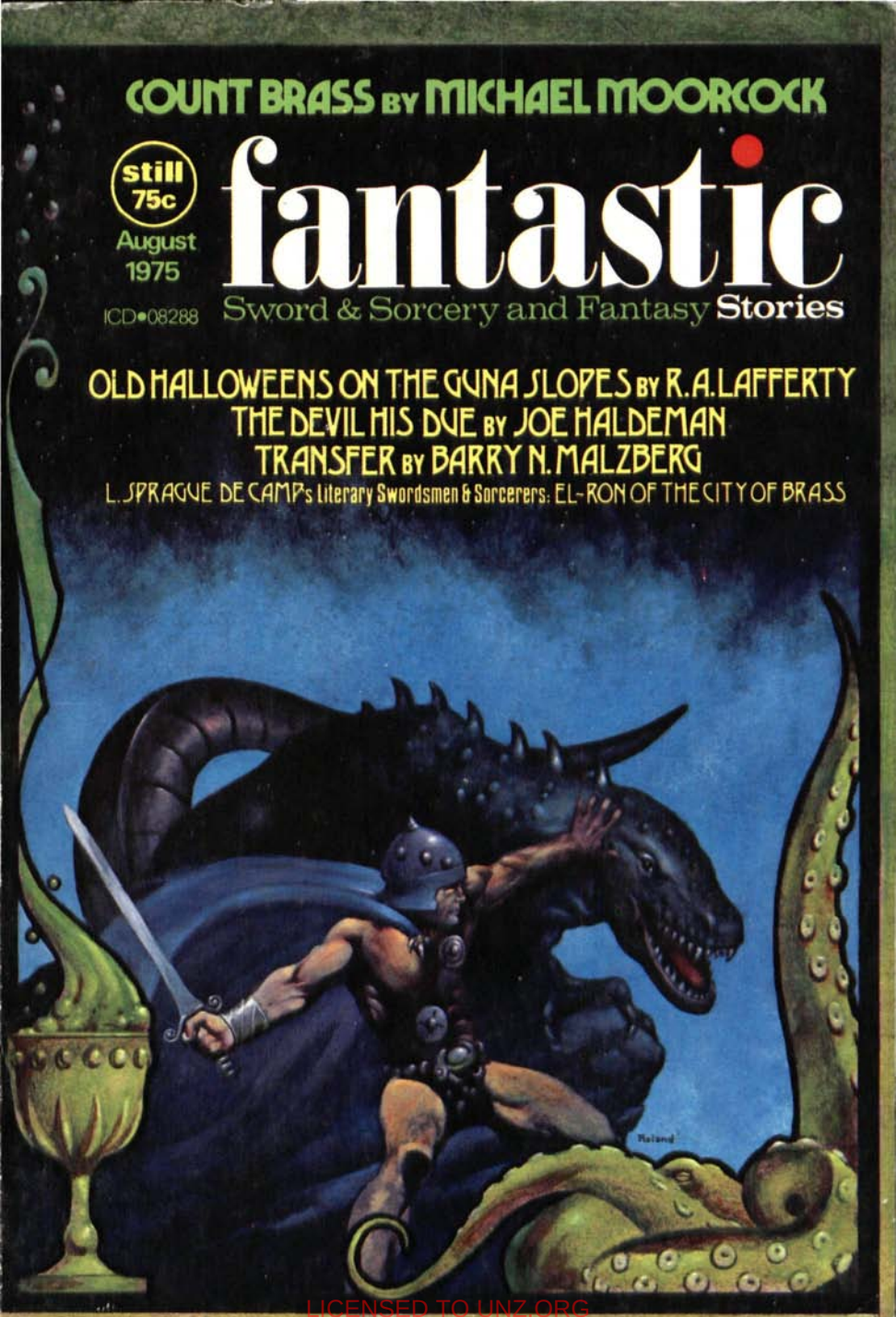
Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

OLD HALLOWEENS ON THE GUNA SLOPES BY R.A.LAFFERTY

THE DEVIL HIS DUE BY JOE HALDEMAN

TRANSFER BY BARRY N. MALZBERG

L. SPRAGUE DE CAMP's Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers: EL-RON OF THE CITY OF BRASS



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DEATH FROM THE SEA (*See page 23*)

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Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories

ALL STORIES NEW

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TED WHITE

editorial

YOU'LL NEVER SEE IT HERE: Back when *Galaxy* magazine was in its infancy, in the early 1950's, an ad appeared on its back cover which read "You'll Never See It In *Galaxy*". Below the headline were two parallel paragraphs, one of which began, "Jets blasting, Bat Durston. . ." The point of the ad (in which a paragraph of a supposed western story was compared with a paragraph of space-opera, in which "six-guns" became "blasters") was that *Galaxy* would never stoop to space-opera or other lessor forms of stf.

Recently I received in the mail the latest releases from DAW Books, one of which was John Norman's *Marauders of Gor*. Norman's Gor series, you'll recall, began publication under the Ballantine Books imprint (a company which has recently come out four-square in *favor* of space-opera, under the editorship of a former editor at *Galaxy*—small world, isn't it?), and after Ballantine dropped the series (despite, I'm told, good sales) DAW picked it up. *Marauders* ("The 1975 Gor Novel!") is the ninth book in the series.

Thumbing through the book, I came upon an interior illustration (a rarity in paperbacks, but there were three, counting the frontispiece, in this book) by Kelly Freas. It showed a lush looking blonde woman chained to an upright of some sort, arms above her head, naked breasts swelling, a vague wisp of cloth draping her hips, looking back in anticipation and fear to a stereotypical Norseman, horned helmet and all, who is sternly fingering a whip.

Glancing at the surrounding text, I quickly established that the blonde is Hilda, "daughter of Thorgard of Scagnar," while her captor is Ivar Forkbeard. The entire scene—which runs to most of a chapter—is a bondage/domination scene in which proud Hilda is taught to "obey," through the use of humiliation, starvation, whipping, and the destruction of her clothing. Ultimately she submits sexually, "willingly," after having been bound and locked in an icehouse, naked upon blocks of ice.

The story is narrated by Tarl Cabot, the series hero, who has his own dalliances to consider: One Olga, momentarily bound to a roof post, "tried futilely to free herself. She looked at me, agonized. 'Untie me,' she begged.

"I looked at her.

"'My body wants you, Tarl Red Hair,' she wept. 'My body needs you!'

"I looked away from her, paying her no more attention. I heard her moan, and rub her body on the post. 'I need you, Tarl Red Hair,' she whimpered.

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"I would let her smolder for another Ahn or two. By that time her body would be ready. To my slightest touch it would leap, helpless, squirming, in my arms. I would use her twice, the second time in the lengthy use of the Gorean master, that use in which, over an Ahn, the female slave or bond-maid is shown no mercy.

" 'Mead!' I called. Pretty Ankles rushed to serve me. I again bent to kiss the lips of Thyri."

That's on page 131. By page 135, having observed of Thyri that "I had no special claim on the pretty little bond-maid, no more than any other among the Forkbeard's men. The delicious little thing, like the other goods of the hall, was, for most practical purposes, for the use of us all," Tarl notices Olga once more:

" 'Tarl Red Hair,' I heard.

"I followed the sound of the voice and, to my delight, as Ottar had left her, she slipping his mind apparently, as she had mine, her hands still tied before her, about the post, kneeling in the dirt, was Olga.

" 'I hate you, Tarl Red Hair,' she said.

"I knelt beside her. I had intended to permit her to smolder for a time, she much aroused, and then later, when she had been much heated with need and desire, when, cruelly deprived, she had been aching to break into flame, throw her to my furs, but, unfortunately, I had forgotten about her.

" 'I forgot about you,' I told her.

" 'I hate you, Tarl Red Hair,' she said.

"I reached out to touch her. She shrank back in fury.

" 'Would you please untie me?' she asked."

That would appear to be a fairly representative sampling of both the prose style and philosophy of John Norman, whose *Imaginative Sex* is to date DAW Books' only non-fiction (and non-stf or fantasy) book. I'm told Norman, a university professor (!), adamantly resists any editorial "tampering" with his wooden, non-sequiteur-laiden prose.

Imaginative Sex ("with 53 detailed scenarios for sensual fantasies and a revolutionary new guide to male-female relations," to quote the front cover blurb for this book which "presents a startling new approach to sexual fulfillment") was apparently written in order to present scenes which Norman couldn't justify putting into his Gor novels. Some of his "Sensuous Fantasies: Recipes for Pleasure" are "The Wife-as-Pickup Fantasy," "The Wife-as-Whore Fantasy," "The Wife-as-Stripper Fantasy," "The She-Is- Forced-to-Please-Him-as-a-Bound-Captive-Fantasy," and—I'll bet he enjoyed *this* one—"The I-Want-an-'A'-Professor Fantasy." The depth of Norman's insight can be found in such passages as this one (found by opening the book at random to page 201):

"Not all psychiatrists and psychologists, of course, are fools. Some of them, particularly the more insightful and brilliant, and perhaps the less scrupulous, realize precisely what they are--doing. They have a good thing going for them and they do not wish the boat to rock. It is a world which, in effect, they have built for their own power and aggrandizement. Most people do not question such a world. It might be taken as a manifestation of abnormality to do so, as a symptom of some more serious underlying disorder, which might take years to adequately treat." That's ripped

(cont. on page 117)

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Halloween seems an innocent enough time these years, although rumors abound of poisoned candies, ground glass in cookies, and other malignancies which do more to frighten parents than their children. R. A. Lafferty makes a rare appearance in these pages to suggest that we're really not aware of the half of it, as he recalls—

OLD HALLOWEENS ON THE GUNA SLOPES

R. A. LAFFERTY

Illustrated by RICHARD OLSEN

"YAH, YAH!" Mary Mondo chanted. "You old men say 'They don't make them like they used to.' I think they don't even make old men like they used to. What they make now are old nothing duffers."

"Be quiet, young girl!" Harry O'Donovan spoke. "Oh damnation! There I go again, answering spooks and things that aren't even there; answering evening room-noises and windy talk. Talk about nothing people! Mary, you are a real nothing person."

Mary Mondo was a spook. She was seldom either visible or audible. She inhabited the room there along with Loretta Sheen the one-time daughter of Barnaby Sheen: Loretta herself was half spook and half sawdust-filled doll.

"The fact is that they *don't* have Halloweens like they used to," Harry went on. "There used to be an old kraut-head named Kalbfleish who lived twixt this place and Cris Benedetti's house. We plagued that man and he plagued us. He was built like a barrel, and to us he seemed old. But he was fast. Whenever we made an evening disturbance on his front porch, started a little leaf fire there or broke a few bottles, set off a couple of stink bombs (you could get those little glass bombs two for a nickel at Selby's store then), whenever we did such things he would come tearing out of his front door, leap the side railing of his porch, and hit running. He knew which way we would go (there was only one way for us to go to find a hiding place) and he would collar a couple of us before we could get gone. And he would beat us till our tails howled like basset hounds."

"Carrock! Get on with the story, Harry," Austro said. Austro was a pleasant and hairy young man of the species Australopithecus.

"Mrs. Kalbfleish would abet him," said Harry. "She'd sound

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off like a preacher bird, and they'd come with a high-footed run, wary of our tripping ropes. So naturally both sides of the antagonism waited anxiously for Halloween every year. The Kalbfleishes were always ready for war, and I myself had assembled a good gang of young boys."

What was the matter with Harry? *We* had been his gang or he had been in our gang: he wasn't a leader. The gang had been made up of Barnaby Sheen, John Penandrew, George Drakos, Cris Benedetti, and Harry O'Donovan, those kids who knew everything, and myself who didn't. (Wait a bell-ringing minute there! Let us not read history backwards! Of course I knew everything then and for many years afterwards. It was not until—ah, well let us not read history backwards.) Well, why should Harry tell *us* one of our own adventures? Or maybe we had it remembered wrong and he would set us right.

"Halloween was a very rainy afternoon and night that year," Harry said, "and we were the only gang out. It had already rained for a week, and the mud was bottomless. You couldn't do much in that mud; but you could *dig*, if you didn't mind the mud. It was dark by five in the afternoon and the rain and the thunder were so loud that we couldn't be heard. We dug a pit eight feet square and eight feet deep along the side of the Kalbfleish's front porch. We jimmied several down-spouts, we damned up a couple of runnels, and that pit was filling nicely.

"One of us had a big can full of kerosene. Another of us had a pumpkin-head with a candle burning in it. That one was John Penandrew with his funny-shaped face and head. We always said that he still had a pumpkin-head after he threw his lighted pumpkin-head into the pit that night. We were going to start a fire on the Kalbfleish's front porch to devil them out. But the kid with the kerosene stumbled and fell into our own pit. He spilled three gallons of kerosene into it, less what he swallowed, and he nearly choked to death himself. So John Penandrew went up to the Kalbfleish's ornate front door and began to break little panes of glass out of it with a hammer. That always brought them out, and it brought them out now like two thunderbolts, man and wife in that high-footed run and the wife sounding like a preacher bird. Penandrew, with those two big people after him, lept the porch railing and almost lept the pit. But he didn't quite make it. He was sliding on the edge of the pit and flailing about with that lighted pimpkin-head. The two Kalbfleishes lept the railing right behind him and went in over their heads in the water and kerosens-filled pit. Penandrew dropped the pumpkin-head in trying to get his balance, and the explosion blew him clear out of

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there. Man, that was an explosion of water and mud and fire. They don't have Halloweens like that anymore."

"What happened then?" I asked. I had been there, but I didn't remember it at all the way that Harry was telling it.

"Oh, Kalbfleish was out of the hospital in three months," Harry said, "though of course he was scarred forever. His wife died from a combination of drowning and burning to death. We felt bad about it for a while. But by the time the next Halloween rolled around we were ready for another go. Kalbfleish had another wife by then, and they were ready for another go at it too."

The door chimes were ringing downstairs. "I'll go," said Mary Mondo. She took candy from the candy bowl and floated down. There was the sound of the front door opening and of little voices like birds twittering 'Trick or Treat.' Then someone cried 'Awk!' in a more mature voice, and then there was a sound 'klunk'. After a while the front door was heard to close again, and Mary Mondo came back upstairs.

"That lady fainted and klunked her head on the door-stone," Mary said. "Seeing me didn't bother the kids, but it sent the lady into a faint. Why do ladies faint when they see ghosts? I don't faint when I see people."

"Is she all right, Mary?" Barnaby-Sheen asked. All this was at Barnaby's house.

"No, of course she isn't all right," Mary said. "The way she klunked her head on that door-stone, I bet she never does get all right."

"I REMEMBER one Halloween," said George Drakos, "when Bittle McLittle, the smallest man in the world, was playing in the vaudeville at the old Orpheum Theatre. We had made friends with Bittle and he went around with us that night. They weren't having the regular vaudeville that evening: they were having a triple bill of silent movie ghost pictures. My cousin Zoe Archikos (she was very blonde and very precocious, for nine years old) was with us that night and she carried Bittle McLittle wrapped up in a blanket like a baby. She went up to the Paldeen house and banged on the door. And Mr. Paldeen opened the door. He was a funny man with a harelip and a voice that went with it.

" 'Oh go away kids,' he said in that harelippy way. 'I don't want any trouble with you.'

" 'This is your child that I have in my arms,' Zoe said in her brassy way, 'and these are my six lawyers. Now pay off or we will have you on a patality suit.'

" 'Paternity suit,' Bittle McLittle the child in her arms corrected her.

" 'What is it, Peter?' Mrs. Paldeen called from inside.

" 'Oh, it's just that brassy little Archikos girl with some nonsense

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about a paternity suit,' Mr. Paldeen harelipped to his wife inside. But the wife came to the door all in a turmoil.

"'Oh, Peter Paldeen, whatever have you done?' she wanted to know. 'Zoe, are you sure that Peter is the father of your child? Can you prove it?'

" 'Oh sure, I think so,' Zoe said.

" 'Certainly we can prove it,' said Bittle McLittle the child in Zoe's arms, and he said it in a harelippy voice. (Bittle was a mimic. All those people in a vaudeville learned to mimic all kind of voices and also to play different instruments in the orchestra if necessary.) 'Would I sound just like him if he weren't my father?'

" 'Oh what a terrible thing!' Mrs. Paldeen wrung her voice. 'Peter, that little baby talks just like you. That proves he's your son. Oh, what do you want us to do, Zoe?'

" 'Pay, pay, pay,' Zoe cried righteously. 'Money, money. Eight dollars. There are eight of us here.'

" 'Eight dollars!' Peter Paldeen moaned. 'I work all week for eight dollars! Oh, oh, what have I done to deserve this?'

" '*You* know what you've done, Peter,' Mrs. Paldeen said angrily. 'There's no other way. Think of the disgrace. Pay, Peter, pay!'

"Mr. Paldeen went into the house and came back with the money. He gave a dollar to each of us, to Zoe, to Bittle McLittle in her arms, to Harry O'Donovan and to Barny Sheen and to John Penandrew and to Chris Benedetti and to Laff and to me. It had worked.

" 'Hey, wait a minute,' Peter Paldeen harelipped. 'Wait a broomcorn-cutting min—'

" 'Scramble!' Bittle McLittle howled and not in a harelippy voice. Zoe threw him and he hit running, and we were all running off in eight different directions.

" 'How come a little baby like that could talk at all?' Mrs. Paldeen was keening. 'Why were you so stupid to give them the money, Peter? How come a little baby like that was smoking a cigar?'

" 'How come a little baby like that can run like that?' Peter Paldeen panted somewhere behind us. But he couldn't run in eight directions, and he couldn't catch any of us at all. Ah, they just don't make Halloweens like that any more."

The door chimes rang downstairs. "I'll go," said Mary Mondo. She took bubble gum from the bubble gum bowl and floated down. There was the sound of the front door opening and of little voices like crickets twittering 'Trick or Treat.' Then someone cried 'Awk!' in a more womanly voice. After that there was a 'klunk' sound. A little later the front door was heard to close again, and Mary Mondo came back upstairs.

"That lady fainted and klunked her head on the door-stone just

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like the first one did," Mary Mondo said. "How come I scare the ladies when I don't scare the little kids?"

"Is she all right, Mary?" Barnaby Sheen asked.

"No, of course she isn't all right," Mary said. "How is anybody going to be all right after a klunk like that? I hope nobody slips on the blood she got on the door-stone."

"NO, THEY DON'T make them like they used to," Barnaby said. "I remember one Halloween when the old Orcutt streetcar still ran down St. Louis street. It ended at Orcutt Park on the lake, and there was a turn-around there. One of the car-men lived in a shanty in the park. He would drive the last run at night and the first run in the morning, and he would leave the streetcar all night on the turn-around.

"On this side of the park, before you got to the turn-around, there were some stately mansions on the lake shore. One of the most stately belonged to the Dumbarton family. Mr. Dumbarton was from France. He was a millionaire. He owned one of the refineries out by Sand Springs. But he was a swishy dude: my own father used to say that about him. So we'd fix that swishy dude!

"We had a couple of frogs, those iron rail-clamps made to switch cars from one track to another where there isn't a regular switching place. We picked a high place about a hundred feet from the turn-around, and we fastened the frogs to the tracks there. Then we went to the streetcar, put the trolley up to the trolley-wire, got in the car, and started it up. We got all the speed we could going up that rise. We hit the frogs and we derailed, and we kept on going downhill on that new pavement that they had there. We had it all figured perfectly. We even had measured that concrete ramp going up to the Dumbarton front porch, the one they made for Mr. Dumbarton's grandmother to go up in her wheel-chair on. It was wider than it needed to be for a wheel-chair to go on. It was just exactly wide enough for a streetcar to go on if we hit it just right.

"We rolled down that hill faster and faster, and we stomped on that trolley-bell 'Clang! Clang! Clang!' Oh, I wish they still made trolley-bells like that! I wish they still made trolley-bells at all. There wasn't any way to steer that streetcar when it wasn't on tracks. It steered itself. The street turned sharply there, but the driveway of the Dumbartons was in a straight line. We went up that driveway, up the ramp onto the front porch or veranda, down the whole length of the porch (Clang! Clang! Clang!) and clear through a wall at the end.

"And through the wall was the Master Chamber of the Dumbarton's house. That Master Chamber was probably the

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biggest bedroom in town, but it was a little bit crowded with a full sized streetcar right in the middle of it. And we kept clanging that trolley-call. A trolley-bell sounds quite a bit louder when the streetcar is inside a bedroom.

"'*Sancta Agatha!*' Mrs. Dumbarton cried out in her fine voice as she sat up in bed.

"'*Ora pro nobis!*" Mr. Dumbarton cried out in an even finer voice, and he sat up in bed too. And 'Clang! Clang! Clang!' went that trolley-bell. The Dumbartons, waking up like that, thought that the trolley-bell was a church bell back in France.

"They begin to ring the church bells at midnight there, when Halloween is over with and All Saints' Day begins. And they begin to chant that Litany of the Saints. You know, though, that swishy dude caught on real fast. I never saw a man comprehend a streetcar in the middle of his bedroom so fast. And I never saw a two-handed creature collar six kids at once as fast as he did. And he seemed to have hands left over to—"

"Ah, they don't make Halloweens like that any more!" we all breathed together.

THE DOOR CHIMES rang downstairs. "I'll go," said Mary Mondo. She took balloons from the balloon bowl. Then she said "I'd better take a pillow and put it on that door-stone so the ladies won't klunk their heads so hard. May a sonder-effect ghost-trap get me if I don't put a pillow there!" She floated downstairs carrying a little pillow and quite a few balloons, blowing some of them up as she went. It was easy to see how Mary Mondo would startle people who weren't used to her. She hadn't any body at all. When she did things with her hands, such as handing out candy or balloons, then her hands did make an appearance, but it was false appearance. When she spoke, there was mouth and throat and movement to be seen, but they were illusion. When she grinned there was an appearance of everted lips and of red tract tissue all through her. Mary Mondo had a very visceral grin. It was hard to understand how she could be so carnal a person when she hadn't any body to be carnal with.

Below there was the sound of the front door opening and of little voices like pert mice squeaking 'Trick or Treat'. Then someone cried 'Awk!' in a young-wifey voice. After that there was a curiously modified sound, like a 'klunk' wrapped in feathers. Mary Mondo had got the pillow on the door-stone in time.

"That is probably all the little kids there will be tonight," Austro remarked. "Now I suppose that there will be two or three big kids troubling around." And Austro gave a near shiver.

"You're surely not afraid of all the big kids in the world, are you, Austro?" Barnaby Sheen asked.

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"There's two or three big kids I might be afraid of," Austro said with another shiver. "I might be afraid of them on just this one night of the year."

There was the sound of the front door closing again. Mary Mondo came back upstairs. "That's likely all the little kids there will be tonight," Mary said. "Oh, by the sounder-effect ghost-trap itself I hope there won't come two or three of those big kids!"

I hope Paracelsus doesn't come," said that big, not-so-very-lifelike, sawdust-filled doll on the sofa, the doll that had once been the body of Loretta Sheen. Then the doll mumbled something else that we couldn't understand.

"What is the matter with you two kids, with you three kids?" Barnaby Sheen asked. "Why are you afraid of two or three big kids when you were never afraid of anything before? Why is Loretta afraid of Paracelsus?"

"I'll ask her," said Mary Mondo. And Mary did ask her, in the sort of talk that those two used together. But we couldn't understand the answer, and it seemed that Mary couldn't either; or she didn't want to.

"I'm cold," Mary said. "I don't want to go back. I can't let them take me back. I'm cold, and I'm scared of the sonder-effect ghost-trap."

"Ghosts don't get cold," Harry O'Donovan stated. But whenever did Harry know what he was talking about?

"I'm cold too," Austro said. He was doing the weekly Rocky McCrocky episode with hammer and chisel on light gray slate-stone. He filled the incisions with black pigment or graphite, and clear and striking pictures were the result. He would split the light gray slate-stone very thin as he finished each panel, and it made almost perfect episode pictures. It was in such form that Austro gave the continuing Rocky McCrocky drama to the young people of the neighborhood and of the world.

"I don't want to turn into one," Austro moaned. "I can't let them turn me into one. I'm scared of the monkey wrench."

We whooped and jeered at this, and Austro looked startled.

"I don't mean the tool that you call a monkey wrench," Austro said. "Carrock, it's a tool made out of air and not iron. It follows and it enters you. It finds that little monkey that is in you and it wrenches it sideways. There's no other way to say it. You don't get more monkey in you or less monkey: you get that monkey twisted, and it will change you completely. It can even change you into a *sapi*—No, no, I'll not let them change me! Carrock!"

OUTSIDE THERE WAS a happy shouting in the distance. It could have been any Halloween noise, but it sounded like the shouting voices of Roy Mega and Chiara

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Benedetti. Roy Mega was a very young electronic genius who worked for Barnaby Sheen. Chiara was an even younger person, and she was the daughter of Cris Benedetti who was there in the room with us. Neither Roy nor Chiara had any evil in them at all. But they both had something in them that often seemed the rankest evil ever. It was always saved from being evil only by the most improbable revelation arriving in the last possible nick of time. But if either the revelation or the nick of time should fail, the thing in them would have been and would continue to be murderously evil, and it would be of murderous effect on everyone whom they touched.

"I ought to go out with a couple of friends and rescue someone tonight," Mary Mondo said. She listened for the shouting, and it had become a permeating phenomenon. "I'm afraid to go out if Paracelsus is there, and I'm twice afraid to go out if Morgana is there too."

"Mary, what did Loretta say?" Barnaby Sheen asked.

"She said that Paracelsus was alive again," Mary Mondo said. "He's enough to put the shivers into any honest spook anywhere. It's on account of him that I'm afraid to go out tonight, and I should. There's a young boy out there and somebody should be with him. This is his first year-night since we rescued him. Let me tell you all about it.

"It was a year ago tonight. Several of us got the feeling that the little boy was going to be killed. On this portal-night we are able to rescue one who has been unjustly handled. He will still be killed, yes: but, when he is killed, he will go with us; he will not go where dead people go. It was at that little wading pool for kids down in Honey Locust Park. It was just at sundown. There were two middle-sized girls there (six or seven years old), and they had decided to drown the little boy. A lady was on duty there, and she watched it and pretended not to see it. She had been overtaken by that special evil that can enter only into *homo saps*. She didn't want anyone to see it; she didn't want anyone to know it: but she wanted those two middle-sized girls to drown that little boy, and she wanted him to suffer that black strangulation that is the worst suffering of all."

"How would Loretta know that Paracelsus was alive?" Barnaby Sheen asked Mary. "How would she recognize him at all? He's been dead for hundreds of years."

"How do you know?" Mary asked. "Did you see him dead? I don't believe that he's ever been dead; he's just been off traveling sometimes. Loretta can feel him now. I can too."

"I can too," said, no, not said, but anyhow expressed Rocky McCrocky. Austro was brushing black graphite into the sticky glyphs of a talk-balloon coming

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out of the mouth of Rocky McCrocky in his comic strip. Back on the Guna Slopes Austro would have used monkey grease to take the coloring in these cuts. Now he used grape jelly. This was the weekly comic strip that Austro chiseled on the light gray slatestone, from which he then split off the episode panels to give to the young people of the world. Now the words "I can too" appeared suddenly like a ringing exclamation. And we all knew that the character Rocky McCrocky was really Austro himself.

"What's the matter, Austro," I asked him. "Has someone thrown a monkey wrench into your continuity?"

"Carrock! Do you not yet understand the meaning of that horrible phrase that you use so lightly? Yes, I can feel that person too. That isn't the name that he used when he visited on the Guna Slopes and turned the blood of so many of us to water. But it is the same person. He is even a friend of mine. But is he yet aware that he is that person?"

"Loretta cannot feel anyone that she hasn't known in life," Barnaby said.

"She says that she did know him in life," Mary Mondo tried to explain. There was a lump of something unspoken in Mary's throat. All that could be seen of her was her mouth and her throat as she spoke and tried to speak more. "She says that she knew Paracelsus in life, and Morgana also. Could she have? She says that he had just begun to be Paracelsus when she knew him.

"Well, the lady watching over the children at the wading pool in the park was in a time of willful insanity. Her face became a funny shape as she watched," Mary Mondo was going on with her story. That lump of something unspoken could still be seen in her throat, but now it began to fade away from our vision: it would remain unspoken. "The two middle-sized girls had finished drowning the little boy by then. They took him out of the pool and dragged him away for several blocks. (They thought that they did; they didn't have him though; we had him away from them where he would be safe.) They bashed in the face of his body with rocks. They left his body on a front porch a couple of blocks from Honey Locust Park. They rang the doorbell there. They hollered out in those cracked jangle voices that evil people use 'Bong the bell, bong the bell! See the boy that's gone to hell!' (He hadn't gone there, though: we had rescued him; he was with us.) The middle-sized girl rhymed their rhyme again (this was before children used to say 'Trick or treat'), and they ran just as the door was opened. I felt sorry for the people who opened the door and found the bashed-in and drowned body. And the boy was nervous for the rest of that night as he went around with us. He would be able

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to enter into the spirit of it tonight though, for this is a year later. I should be with him. I hope one of them is with him."

"AUSTRO, DID YOU have Halloweens on the Guna Slopes when you were a boy?" Doctor George Drakos asked. The Guna Slopes are in Africa, in Ethiopia, northwest of Magdala which is a town older than *homo sapiens*; and the slopes look down on the Tacazze branch of the Nile from two miles above it. That is where Austro had come from, where he had lived his early boyhood, where what is left of the Australopithecines still live.

"Certainly we had Halloweens," Austro said. "Carrock! We invented them. Where do you think are to be found the great originals of your weak imitations? We made grotesque *sapiens* heads out of big gourds and burned bee-wax or aphid-wax candles in them. We would climb around and ring the door-bells at the porticos of the different caves, and we—"

"Wait, wait, wait!" Harry O'Donovan objected. "Don't tell us that the Australopithecines had door-bells!"

"Sure we did!" Austro maintained. "Sure they were real ones, Cris. Sure they were electric ones, George. Well hell, Barnaby, we used lead-sulphuric-acid batteries: that's a lot easier than winding transformers. Why, John, we got the sulphur for the acid from our own Guna Slopes. The best deposits in Africa are still there. How would we *know* what the acid was, Laff? Why, how do the *sapiens* know what it is? I notice that the *sapiens* young scribble a translation of one of our rhymes in their chemistry books:

Alas poor James is dead!
We'll see his face no more.
For what he thought was H_2O
Was H_2SO_4.

I believe that the *sapiens* do not, as we do, generally teach chemistry by mnemonics however. That may be why they teach it so badly. Carrock!"

"Don't interrupt Austro, guys," Barnaby begged. "It makes him loquacious. Believe me, he always has answers. If you read his weekly Rocky McCrocky strip as the neighborhood kids do you would know those answers."

"Sometimes we failed to ring the door-bells," Austro said. "Certain wise caveholders would remove the push-buttons that night and paint the holes to look just like push-buttons. When we pressed our finger there it went all the way into the hole. And a pair of sharp rock-scissors would make short work of the finger, short work by a joint or two. See!"

Asutro held up an index finger that was minus the end joint. He had told quite a few stories about that missing joint though. I myself doubted that he had lost it by poking it into a hole that was painted to look like a push button.

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"But mostly we would push the button, ring the bell, and then drop flat on our bellies," Austro said. "And why would we drop flat? Because the door itself would come flying out to kill anyone in its way. The caveholders shot their doors off by catapults. That's how we kept the slow-thinking kids thinned out. The caveholders could always make new doors, but if the slow-thinking kids were not killed on this great night then there would have been the occurrence of slow-thinking adults in a few years."

"I bet I know a way to cure that dropping-on-the belly," Mary Mondo said.

"Oh well, when you find yourself eye-to-eye with a mamba snake that is half your weight and four times your length, you're almost ready to concede a point," Austro said. "When you're down on your belly you're facing the mamba at his own game. But there's a counter for almost every trick. We always ran scared on Halloween night though. We knew that we were being given the most horrifying of all tests and that one of us was destined to fail it. The name of the test was Dumb Cluck Stuck, and the dumbest cluck of all the kids would be stuck with the fate worse than death."

Downstairs and outside in the streets the shouting had become still happier and louder, but also more frightening. The feeling filled the night like a justifying fog that not only were several persons going to commit overturning outrages that night but that (on this one night) they would have the right to commit them.

"There were always double-creatures who appeared on that year-night to exact payment," Austro was saying. "One of the double-persons might be a young boy, a boy you knew well. But he would be wearing a long white beard with thongs that pretended to tie it onto his face. The beard was to show what person he really was for that night. It *would not be* a false beard. The boy would have grown the real white beard especially for that night. It was the thongs that were false in pretending to tie the beard to the face. And yet both the real beard and the false thongs were needed for the duality, for the duplicity."

Below and outside, a monkey howled and sobbed in withering agony and resounded its degradation in the hellish jungle. (There was not, in actual fact, any hellish jungle down there, though the yard between Sheen's where we were and Benedetti's did need cutting.) The monkey gave its wrenching howling and sobbing in the terrifying outdoors, and also in the terrifying personal interiors, for it was the ghost monkey.

"These double-persons that one knew and still did not know would be the ones who wrenched the little person in the victim out of shape and sent the victim into the

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world howling in desolation," Austro said. "That was always the horror of the Halloween night (your name, not ours: we may not speak the real name of the night out loud or our tongue will rot in our mouth) that the ghost inside, the monkey inside, would be tortured and would split the victim. There was no escaping it if they put the monkey on your back, if they deformed him out of his right position.

"Sometimes the bearded double-person would have a doubled-consort: sometimes there would even be a third of these two-facers. It was always mighty steep damage that they did to the designated Dumb Cluck on the year-night."

Howling monkeys in our breasts and in the spooky streets of our end of town! But it was only Roy Mega and Chiara Benedetti outside, hollering and yowling and having fun, becoming prodigies and paragons, becoming (at the same time) ghosts and blood-persons, blenching and wrenching people.

"There's two or three big kids that *I'm* afraid of also," Cris Benedetti said thoughtfully. "What, shall our dragon children hunt us off our own slopes and make us to hide in the common pens?" (What was Cris talking about?) "Well, I don't want to be forced into the common pens or the common species. I don't want to be a part of the forced grubbiness any more than Austro does, any more than Mary Mondo does. Did we only imagine that we were somehow uncommon? Does the special part really have to end now?" An uncommon bug was biting Cris Benedetti.

"Yes, for one of you the special part has to end tonight," Austro said. He put aside his rock-chipping on the cartoon strip Rocky McCrocky and went to mix drinks for the bunch of us.

Outside, Oliver Benedetti howled in protest and near anger. Oliver was the dog of Cris Benedetti and of his daughter Chiara. He had always been a skeptical and intelligent dog. Cris even said that the dog had become a freethinker.

"One year the main double-role was played by a boy who was no more than four years old," Austro was saying as he did alchemical things with the drinks. "He had grown a genuine, white, long beard just for that night, and he didn't even know how to tie the thongs that were to pretend to hold the beard onto the face. The thongs dangled down around his feet, but the beard was real. And he was real in the role. He was the part human, part ghost, part magus magician named Par-Ha-Kels. And when he pointed to a victim, the ghost monkey howled and gibbered inside that victim: and the victim left his folks and went sorrowfully down the slopes to serve and to be the lesser things forever."

There was a small riot in the

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street outside. One of the street gangs had come there in the wrecking spirit, and it sounded as though the wreckers had been challenged by a pair of wreckers much more violent than themselves. The dog Oliver Benedetti howled again, not against the intruding gang, but against his own mistress. Even that freethinker had recognized sudden strangeness in his own kindred.

"It used to be that the Dumb Cluck pointed out by the magician and his consort to be the victim would simply fall down on the stones and howl himself to an agonizing death. Then they changed it. Carrock! How they changed it! The victim still died, I suppose, in a way; died and turned into clay. But he went away from his own slopes when he died, went walking away he did, and he went to serve a more common clay. There's been an accommodation arranged, you know. The victim had to go and serve the more common clay after he was dead and gone from his own people, but he did not have to *become* the common clay, not unless he was selected as a victim the second time. There's an important distinction there. Carrock, carrock, preserve us in this distinction!"

The street gang that had come in a wrecking spirit had been defeated, had been almost annihilated, had left in gibbering and insane confusion. And if several of them had remained behind, recumbent and witless, in the street, then maybe they would recover after this year-night was finished with. The scene in the street outside drifted up into our room clearly, possibly by the mind of the ghost-girl Mary Mondo, possibly by the projection of the magicians themselves.

"Austro, you always seemed sort of a Dumb Cluck to me," Harry O'Donovan said brutally. "How come you weren't ever adjudged to be the dumb cluck in the Dumb Cluck Stuck test?"

"Carrock! I was so adjudged. It did happen to me," Austro said in a shocking and thick voice. "I was adjudged the Dumb Cluck last year. *This* is my fate worse than death. How do you think I'd have come among *sapiens*, if I hadn't been caught as dumb cluck. After the really slow-thinking kids have been killed and dragged away, then they select the victim, the scapegoat, the Judas-monkey. Earlier, these were simply killed by the Halloween-night tortures. Then, with a worsening of our relations with the Thrones and Powers, it was decreed that the victim must go down from the slopes and live in a *sapiens* town. It would raise the mental level of both species, so the Powers said in justification. And so it has been yearly since that time.

"They kill the monkey when they do it, you know. The *sapiens* doctors have another name for this Monkey Within. They wrench it, and it dies again and again with

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the wildest wailing ever. But it's ghost monkey as well as an interior monkey. I was a victim last year. I went down the Guna Slopes to live among *sapiens*, and it was then that I ran into one of Barnaby Sheen's crews and came here with them. Oh, we smart clucks, we make our deals and we seek our accommodations; but it still is to be degraded forever."

The pet monkey that belonged to the O'Brians was howling and gibbering and squalling outside. It was infested with the cloud of ghost monkeys that were about on this year-night.

"I never much cared for the *sapiens* myself," Barnaby Sheen said. "Oh, they are the great majority and we must tolerate them. But I prefer my own status, as a being of uncertain species and uncommon clay. I like my clarity. I like my knowledge. I'd miss them if I lost them."

"One of you here present *will* lose these things tonight," Austro said. "Carrock! I should say 'One of *us* here present' for I am not sure that I will not be the victim. And if I am, it will go hard for me. If it's myself, I'll miss knowing everything."

"Austro, you are a fake," Mary Mondo said. "What you have been telling us is only part of the Rocky McCrocky episode that you chiseled Monday."

"It wasn't distributed till an hour ago," Austro said. "And the one that I've been working on this evening, for distribution a week hence, is a more difficult one. It's picking up all the broken rocks after the last crashing episode. It's an elegy for one of us who will die and turn into common clay. I hope it won't be a self-elegy. I don't believe that I could stand being of common clay, being a *sapiens*."

"Neither could I," Mary Mondo said, and she shivered her perverse ectoplasmic spirit.

"Neither could I," said Doctor George Drakos. "Most of our acquaintances belong, but I'd rather remain a little bit special. I suppose that we shouldn't all expect to be special all our lives. Most persons are only special for a few childhood years, and then they slip species to the common. And, really, there isn't that much special clay to go around. Why must they swallow some of us every year on year-night though? There are so many more of them already."

"Why don't they ring that damned bell!" Barnaby Sheen broke out with irritation. "Nothing is more wearisome than waiting for doom to crack, than waiting for lightning to strike, than waiting for the trumpet to sound, than waiting for the last knock on the last door, than waiting for the bell to ring. If one of us stumbles and falls out of it tonight, I hope that it isn't myself."

Easy, Sheen. It was only a Halloween night (they don't make them like they used to), and the only waiting was for kids to ring

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the door-bell again, or not ring it.

"There's an arm-clamp with two long needles that can be put on the outside of a door," Cris Benedetti said, "and it should be set with the needles just eye-high. This is one of the dirtiest of all Halloween tricks. When the bell rings and the householder swings the door open suddenly, then those two eye-height needles—Oh, why doesn't that hellish bell ring?"

"It doesn't hurt so much as all that when you slip a setting or a species," Austro said. "It's only part of your lights that are turned out when it happens. Oh, why doesn't that bell ring!"

"It isn't so bad when just a few fall out of the high basket on just one night of the year," Harry O'Donovan said. "Of course the fell-out-of-it folks have been the majority for many centuries now, but it is the business of us special little trickles to feed the ocean. Oh, why doesn't that bell ring!"

But we were already on our feet and going down the stairs to answer the bell that hadn't rung yet. We carried the drinks that Austro had just finished for us.

"I never expected to be a free spirit," Mary Mondo said. "I've always been a partly enslaved spirit. But I sure do not want to be trapped in one of those contraptions that hardly any light can get in to. And especially I don't want to get trapped in one of the *sapiens* sort." (She meant that she didn't want to get trapped in a body.) "Oh, why doesn't that bell ring?"

The bell rang just as we came to the bottom of the stairway in that big entry hall of Barnaby Sheen's. And we flung the door open.

Aw, owl dirt! It was just two Halloween-night kids at the door in their masks. One of them was Roy Mega that young electronic genius who worked for Barnaby Sheen. He was wearing a Paracelsus long white beard and alchemist's conical hat. They were his mask. The beard was real, but the thongs that pretended to hold it on were fake. The other kid was Chiara Benedetti from down at the end of the block, the daughter of Cris. She was Morgana: that was her mask. How had she got to be Morgana? How had she ever been in Calabria? How had she been the sister of Arthur the King? How had she learned magic? No, no, it was just a Halloween costume.

They had a black cat with them. They had a white monkey. They had a Judas-goat. All just plain Halloween props. Chiara-Morgana blew on her fingers and they lighted up like blue candles.

"Oh go duck for apples somewhere," Mary Mondo said crossly. Mary was scared though. There was something about a sonder-effect ghost-trap in the sparks that came from the Morgana fingers.

"Your symbiosis blows like rack—Your inside monkey's on

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your back," the white monkey simpered in that monkey-mouthed way they have of talking. Morgana's sparks were jumping above our heads and the one that a spark came down on would be the dumb cluck. The stars were twinkling in Paracelsus' conical hat, and every star was of wrong magnitude, wrong ascension, wrong everything.

"Oh, get the pack of you back to the zoo where you belong," Austro grumbled, but he was scared. There was something about the monkey wrench in the almagest-rod that Paracelsus waggled in his hand.

"We bet you wish that you were dead—You hole-in-mind and hole-in-head," the black cat wauled in that gross way they have. Morgana was showering great bunches of sparks out of her candle fingers, and somebody was going to get burned badly.

"For one of you, things to and fro—From this day on you will not know," the Judas-goat bleated. What, no longer be one of the guys who knew everything? Judas-goat, the goat-butcher's knife is hungry for your throat.

Then there was a whole explosion of colored fires, from Chiara-Morgana's finger-candles, from Roy Mega's Paracelsus' rod, from everywhere. Then the two of them ran away, whooping and laughing. Nothing but a Halloween door trick! Oh, a tall, mean giant of a trick! Who had the first spark come down on? Who was the dumb cluck? It wasn't Austro: he sighed a rocky sigh of relief. It wasn't Mary Mondo: she chortled her escape, as only one with a non-material esophagus can chortle. It was one of us who had known everything. Which one had died as he stood there, and turned into a more common clay?

Roy and Chiara ran whooping down the street and left one of us there with a hole in his head (where the know-everything cortical had been), and with a ghost-monkey (wrenched from its interior and rightful den) on his back forever.

No, they don't make Halloweens like they used to. They make them a lot rougher.

—R. A. LAFFERTY

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Attila the Hun makes his first appearance in these pages, in a story of death-defying adventure and magic—in which the youthful Attila, himself a hostage to the Romans, is confronted by—

DEATH FROM THE SEA

HARVEY SCHREIBER

Illustrated by STEVE FABIAN

THIS IS A STORY connected with a major crisis in the youth of Attila the Hun, called "the scourge of God," invader of Europe, and king of his people from 439 to 453 A.D.

It is known that Attila spent his youth in Rome as a hostage to preserve inviolate the Hungarian-Roman border. At the point where the story begins, he is aboard a Roman trireme, accompanied only by his faithful bodyguard Edeco (also called "Strongoak"). The three-decked slave galley is under the command of Chrysivius, a Roman emissary. Although an obese eunuch and seeming bumbler, Chrysivius is a shrewd courtier and an implacable foe of the barbaric Huns. The young Attila must contend not only with him but another, a more spectral foe. He is filled with superstitious dread of the malignant and brutal dwarf, Zerco.

Zerco is a relentless enemy of the young chieftain. At his command are all the fearsome demoniacal forces that serve those who have taken "the left-hand path." That he did unleash these forces, as depicted in the story, is strongly within the realm of possibility.

The youth's only protection from the dark powers assailing him is an ancient scroll given to him by his tribe's aged shaman. The action begins on the slave deck as the trireme, its oars dipping rhythmically into the foam, wends its way towards Rome.

THEY HAD ME NOW, these arrogant Roman dogs, holding me hostage on their abominable slave ship as it sped swiftly home toward Rome. What mattered it if I was Attila, son of the late great chief, Andovar—Attila, prince and hope of the Hun nation. The Romans had no more regard for me than their most wretched slave, chained to the deck—to heave and tug at the oars till all life drained away.

A few feet away stood my faithful guardian and companion, Edeco, silent and grim, his arms spread wide, braced and gripping the ship's rail with rugged strength. Under the pressure his knuckles whitened and his deep-scarred leathern face was suffused with intense emotion. Several times I saw him pass his hand over his head and eyes—and I could glimpse a far-away look steal-

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ing over his face. From time to time he also shook his head, as if a flood of long-forgotten memories was seething through his mind and heart. Looking down from his vantage point on the high gunwale of the forecastle, my friend watched the oars cleaving the blue waters of the Mediterranean, sending the sleek galley speeding on its course.

I knew well why memory was bitter to him. Edeco could never forget the price of that flowing speed and the precise cadence of each oar stroke. For he himself had once been a captive on a slave ship—and in his nostrils still lingered the unmistakable and suffocating stench of the slave deck.

The slave deck also gave forth a unique sound, every bit as recognizable as the vile odor. Booming drumbeats, clanking manacles, groaning oars, creaking wood and straining sinew combined with the moans of men forever lost to set up a cacophony of pain and misery. As the barnacled hull of the craft knifed through the water with increasing speed, sound and smell blended to assail the senses.

Many times, when I was a child, my father had told me how Edeco, his old comrade and now my guardian, whom men called "Strongoak," had survived the galleys by saving the life of a Roman patrician. The aristocrat had rewarded Edeco by placing him in one of the last of the gladiatorial schools in Christian Rome. Despite Pope Leo's firm edict banning the spectacles, certain aficianodas had maintained private and secret arenas. Edeco had saved the life of just such a lover of the ancient death sport. He showed his patrician gratitude by seeking to train Edeco to become his personal champion. Edeco repaid him in kind by wrecking the gladiatorial school and killing its finest instructors . . .

Now my eyes were fixed on the misty horizon. I had never been on a ship before. The rolling deck and the clean salt air both fascinated and unnerved me. The only seas I had ever known were the great seas of tall grasses swaying on the plains of the steppes at home. I had never been so completely removed from them as now. As I struggled to adjust to this strange new element, a sudden thought struck me. Worried, I turned to my old guardian.

"What would happen if we were attacked, Strongoak?" I asked. "Would the slaves be set free and given arms to aid in the ship's defense?"

My guardian looked stern, sullen, almost sad. "The poor devils below decks would be driven to exhaustion with whips and brands," he replied. "Speeds necessary for battle maneuvers on the ocean are *never* attained without the deaths of many rowers. If the galley were to sink, the oarsmen, enslaved and shackled to their oars, would have no chance for escape. The Romans give their slaves freedom only one

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way—through the gates of the Seven Hells!"

I well knew that my people, the Huns, also kept slaves to tend their flocks and till their captured fields. But if a Hun slave performed deeds of great and conspicuous valor in war, he could win his freedom. Even if he only fought well on the battlefield, loyally beside his master, he was often able to accumulate enough war booty to buy his release. To me this was a far cry from spending a lifetime chained to a heavy wooden oar. These wretched Roman slaves could expect only death as a reward for a life of servitude.

I had always felt the loss of freedom was the worst punishment any Hun warrior could endure. Any of them would gladly die fighting in lieu of a lifetime of imprisonment. A lump swelled in my throat as I thought of those poor doomed men, struggling to exist, never again to cast their eyes on the sacred earth or the grandeur of the open blue sky, not to see the stars or hold a sword in a proud fist, never to feel the muscular haunches of a galloping pony beneath them.

My reverie was broken by the slithering approach of the obese Chrysivius, the Roman emissary in charge of the ship. In warning, Edeco's hand locked around my wrist in a tender but firm restraint. Then the fat castrato floated over; for one so bulbous, Chrysivius was extremely light on his feet. Twirling a fat finger around a pomaded curl displaced by the stiff sea breeze, the eunuch opened his rouged lips, intending to speak. But Edeco, not anxious to court disaster, cut him off with a withering glance. He was trying his best to keep as much distance as possible between Chrysivius and me.

"We must see to our mounts and Whitemist, the boy's dog. Excuse us, Your Excellency!" The old warrior was diplomatic but final.

"Dog? Hah!" muttered the harsh Chrysivius. "The animal looks more wolf than dog to me!" The eunuch was deliberately trying to provoke me.

Instead of answering, the two of us turned together and strode off toward the companionway, our boot heels clacking down the wooden steps. Stealing a quick look over my shoulder, I could see the eunuch's lips curling in anger. He was snarling and gesturing in our direction, whispering commands to the centurion, who had come up to stand at the envoy's elbow.

I felt sure he was ordering him to have us watched.

We headed toward the place on deck where we had tethered my faithful pony, Windswift. As he saw us approaching, he pranced and snorted anxiously. I obtained a burlap sack and stuffed it with ripe kernels of various grains. Next I filled a slatted, iron-shod bucket with clear spring water.

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The little horse had never known confinement before, certainly not aboard a rolling and tossing ship. He had been insecure, whinnying restlessly in the cargo hold. The proximity of the slave hold and its accompanying smell of death had added considerably to the skittish animal's disquiet and nervousness.

But when he heard my voice and recognized the reassuring, familiar scent, he lost all discomfort and fear. Munching his oats, he nuzzled my shoulder affectionately. To my dog, Whitemist, I tossed a joint of venison that I had filched from the well-stocked stores of the ship. Wolfing down the meat and heartily lapping up the water, Whitemist leaped up and, leaning on my chest, licked my shaven pate with warm canine enthusiasm. As the two animals let their eyelids droop in a restful, full-bellied slumber, Edeco and I leaned up against the fitted planks of the side of the ship, tired smiles on our faces.

"Strongoak—" I began, a bit hesitantly. I did not want to embarrass my battle-weary guardian by reminding him of his old captivity. "If you don't mind, I—I would like to see the slaves at their rowing," I ventured.

Edeco slowly turned his great head, like some tawny beast of prey regarding a mischievous cub. There was little surprise, however, as if he had long anticipated my request. But there was pain in the old man's eyes. No words were needed; both of us understood the full meaning of that look.

Recovering himself, Edeco swung about and cried: "Let us go then!"

From a nearby vantage point I watched the overseers' vicious prodding of the wretched specimens chained to the twelve-foot oars. With their long, metal-tipped whips the Roman officers lashed the slaves so that they rowed in unison, with strong perfect strokes. My eyes swept over rank after rank of filthy bodies glistening with stripes of dirt etched by rivulets of sweat. None of the half-naked slaves wore more than an odious twist of rag about his loins. All races and lands were represented at the huge oars—blond Teutons, dusky Picts, gargantuan Blacks, dark, wiry Goths, and grey-eyed Gauls—men from every corner of the Empire, all toiling hopelessly, endlessly, for the everlasting glory of Rome.

Alternately fascinated and repelled, I scanned every bench intently. Suddenly my eyes came to rest on a withered and ancient countenance. Then, through the far corners of my eyes, I glimpsed Edeco also staring at the same skeleton of a man. Both of us had been quick to discern vestiges of Hunnish (or at least steppe) origins in the old oarsman. Faded tribal markings were still visible, though barely, on the spindly, shackled old arms. Ritual scars lined the sunken cheeks. As if one

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man, we started together towards the aged slave, our booted heels tapping loudly as we worked our way deftly down the slatted walk that ran between the two sides of rowers' benches. Edeco stopped in midstride, the clanking of his metal trappings and rippling leather breaking off suddenly. His old eyes blazed with the light of half-recognition.

But I did not have the necessary time to question my guardian. A huge, bear-like shape loomed up before us. Mondus, the head overseer, had hustled his prodigious fleshy bulk over to block our path.

Mondus wore a greasy leather jerkin, splashed in many places with red-brown stains of fresh blood. The broad smirk on his face and the glow in his little, piggish eyes gave mute but indisputable testimony to his intentions. The huge, sadistic bully was looking for a fight. In one great paw he held a heavy, metal-shod truncheon. In the other he bore the "Cat," the overseer's favorite weapon. It was a nine-tongued, metal-tipped whip, in the use of which Mondus had acquired an uncanny and deadly skill. He often boasted of being able to initial a man's back with one well-placed stroke by carefully manipulating the "Cat's" nine tentacles. Not one to pick a fight he was not sure of winning, he was perfectly confident that an old greybeard like Edeco and a stripling boy like myself could do little against him, Mondus, "King of the Cat," as he liked to call himself.

I caught Edeco's stern gaze appraising the burly Mondus from head to foot. The old warrior shifted his weight slightly, resting the considerable force of his tall frame on his back foot, and waited. Suddenly a ham of a forearm stretched back, setting the "Cat" in motion, the leather lashes springing to life.

It was then that Edeco flew into violent action—with a blinding speed that seemed impossible for one of his years. Ducking under the deadly serpentine lashes, he grabbed Mondus' wide leather girdle with both huge hands in a grip of iron. Years of hand-to-hand brawling had taught Edeco to use a charging adversary's forward momentum against him. Then, to my amazement, manipulating the four hundred pounds of hurtling beef with the strength of his powerful arms, Edeco sent the bully flying over his back.

Luckily I had leaped to the side. Even so the burning kiss of the leather snakes grazed my legs as I jumped. But the leather breeks that I wore protected me from any real hurt. Meanwhile, the chained slaves had started cheering wildly at the sight of their sadistic tormentor flying through the air, his mouth agape in shocked disbelief. Their oars no longer dipped their blades into the foam in perfect rhythm. Even the Roman Kreustes had frozen in amazement, one of his overhead,

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leather-wrapped wooden mallets poised precariously over his head. The other missed the hide of the kettledrum completely and rebounded obliquely from the rim. He, the timekeeper, had never seen Big Mondus thrown by any man, especially by such an old, grizzled warrior as my guardian.

Nor was I myself content to stay out of the fray. Using the tip of the bench as a makeshift springboard, I launched my body into the air. Twisting, cat-like, to correct my aim, I turned my aerial somersault into an even more difficult maneuver. It succeeded. Both of my knees landed squarely on the shoulders of the still supine Mondus. The next instant I whipped my deadly keen poniard out of its sheath and lifted it to strike.

The helpless overseer looked up, seeing the points of flashing brightness dancing from my blade. His heavy features contorted with an expression of cringing fear. His greasy olive complexion turned two shades paler. Sweat, as profuse as that of the hard-toiling oarsmen, glistened on his fat form.

(Edeco described to me later what a ferocious vision I had made as I advanced on Mondus: "With your scarred features, your blazing eyes, the deadly sharp steel raised for the killing stroke, I saw then and there the fruit of all my years of training!")

. . . Mondus' pig-like eyes were bulging from their sockets. He would have thought to beg for his life, but his swollen tongue was riveted in his parched throat. I struck; and as my knife flashed downward, a squeal of delight arose from the slaves. But just as the blade descended, I reversed the knife, bypassing his throat. The heavy iron pommel connected with Mondus' gargantuan jaw. A loud crack echoed through the slave quarters and everyone knew that Mondus' jaw had snapped like a dry twig.

A heavy hand suddenly fell on my shoulder—and I spun around, instantly on my guard again. But I need not have feared. It was my guardian, jubilant at my feat. With a swift and spontaneous motion, he drew me to his iron-thewed embrace. We hugged each other fiercely as only two warriors who have shared the wild joy of battle and tasted victory, can. No word of emotion passed between us, yet we two now understood each other. Our relationship was no longer like father and son or man and boy. We were now sword brothers, men who had lived through two perilous battles through mutual skill and courage. A new tone sounded in our voices as we stepped gingerly over the mountainous body of our fallen adversary, laughing and talking of the fight. For Edeco, the old soldier, and I, Attila, the young inexperienced adolescent, had fought as one man.

Suddenly the dark lower deck filled with torchlight reflecting

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brightly from rectangular shields and polished steel helmets. Javelins bristled menacingly, and over a foot of naked steel glinted in many fists. Our weapons were quickly drawn; but we were forced to lower them and stare into the blinding glare. The very air was alive with the threat of further violence. A befuddled whine broke the tense silence:

"Why aren't we moving? The slaves at the oars! Where is Mondus? I'll have his hide for this!"

It was Chrysivius, red-faced and seething, shouldering his ponderous bulk through the tightly knit line of shields. His rouged mouth was open in disbelief; he arched a painted eyebrow in anger. Then he stormed at us:

"Oh, not you Huns again! Will your savages never learn!"

Edeco, at my side, was about to attempt an explanation. The centurion was shaking the unconscious Mondus in an effort to bring the burly overseer around. Suddenly both stopped as if stricken. A scream rent the blanket of eerie silence covering the upper deck. Blackness had descended like a heavy cleaver, slicing the very fabric of the daylight. From where I stood, I could see that the trireme and the frothing seas around it, for about a hundred yards, were engulfed in an unnatural, inky darkness.

Looking up and straining my eyes, I finally made out the form of the lookout, perched high in the crow's-nest, struggling to pierce the blackness. Again and again his head turned, his eyes searching the dark waves for some hint of impending danger. Then I heard a tiny splash, echoing far out in the distance. The lookout must have heard it, too, for he spun around in the direction whence it came. Then more, larger, and proportionately louder splashes began to resound all about the foundering trireme. By now I could see the lookout was genuinely alarmed for he kept turning in every direction. The waters came alive, throbbing with an unnatural movement. The gentle waves that had been lapping against the tarred planks of the ship's keel became more violent. Bubbling and boiling, the waves slapped savagely against the gunwales, sprinkling salt spray over the deck and riggings . . .

Then I had a vision, so sharp and vivid I was convinced it was real. It came from many leagues distant. Then I made out an evil titter, sounding through smoke-filled mists, almost as black as the gloom that shrouded the Roman galley. On the dark earthen floor of a yurt I saw a freshly carved series of obscene-looking symbols. There was a mystic circle, its central figure inscribed about a wooden altar table, covered with strangely shaped carven vessels, crude, grotesque little images of antiquity, and tablets and scrolls of aldritch lore. Centrally placed and of obvious importance to the

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ritual was a rune-inscribed shallow bowl cut from a great, single green gem. Coral, barnacles, and sea lichen covered the bottom of the vessel, bespeaking a long stay beneath the sea. The misty jewel from which the bowl was made gave off an eerie, phosphorescent glow. A strangely wrought shell, of a species of mollusk not seen on earth for millennia, floated lazily on the surface of the salty concoction in the vessel. As the garbled chant came to a conclusion, I saw a stub-fingered little claw reach in, scoop the chitinous bit of matter up, and place it to bulging, grey lips.

The figure was unmistakable. It was my remorseless enemy, the devil dwarf, Zerco. Horrified, I watched him puffing up his bulbous cheek and blowing into the curled tip of the shell. As he did so, an unearthly, melodic trilling poured forth from the tiny crustacean. The sound had a shrill, piercing quality almost inaudible to my ear.

Then an inane giggle sounded in Zerco's twisted throat as he dropped a final phrase in the guttural language he had used to chant his rune–sounds like the gurglings of a drowning man.

Suddenly he shouted something that chilled me through:

"They have heard!" rasped the dwarf. "Now they have heard and understood. They are free! Free, to do my bidding!"

As he uttered these words, the vision faded–and I was standing once more shivering, in the cold blackness of the Roman trireme.

II

I HAD NOT had much chance to make the acquaintance of the sailors aboard the trireme since I was closely watched. Yet of one thing I was sure. They were as bold a bunch of rogues as ever rode the whitecaps of the bounding sea. Thracians, Carthaginians, Semites, Phoenicians, and some former Sicilian pirates now all sailed under the purple and gold banner of Imperial Rome. Raggedly clothed in brightly colored silver breeks and tattered bits of stolen finery, ill-fitting and soiled, they made a wild and motley crew. Some wore bright bandannas tied around sweaty brows. Patched eyes, nicked ears, and worm-like scars were common amongst them. One hearty hobbled on an artificial limb of carven whalebone (he swore it came from the dread sea serpent of the Pillars of Hercules). The limb was inscribed with scrimshaw charms against drowning.

I had never before seen fear light his eyes and those of the other rugged mariners. But it was there now. The gloom blanketing their craft had paled their faces and set them clutching at their throats. These formidable seamen had seen action from one end of the world to the other, but now they were in the throes of desperate, blind panic.

I watched them as they ran

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from the port rail to the starboard, eyes bulging, trying to pierce the curtain of darkness. Many dropped to their knees, locked in frantic prayer to Dagin, eldest of sea gods, or any of the other myriad deities of their belief. Every one of these leather-tough old salts sought some natural explanation of the dread phenomenon—an eclipse, an underwater storm, a school of huge whales or giant squid, a hurricane, even the dread monsoon of the Indies, anything. Yet I felt that each man knew deep in his heart that no act of nature was causing these things to happen. This inky fog and broiling sea was magic of the foulest kind.

Then I saw an incredible thing happen. Rovkur of the One Leg, a Thracian and the ship's navigator, was both the oldest and toughest of the sailors. Yet his eyes were growing wild and bloodshot as he turned his bearded head from starboard to port, listening to the loud splashes and their resounding echoes. Suddenly the old salt lifted his hair-rimmed mouth to the black heavens and started to scream. His eyes were bulging in their sockets. He chewed his beard spasmodically. Finally, he released his hands from the ship's long tiller and stretched both arms to full length, pointing madly. Another scream burst from his fear-cracked lips. It lingered between a babbling hysterical laugh and a helpless cry of despair. All of us—Edeco, I, the whole crew—horrified at his corpse-like pallor, followed the direction of his arms down to their straining index fingers with our gaze.

We stared, stupefied, for an arm was being flung over the ship's rail, groping for a handhold. At first, we watched it curiously, believing it to be a man's arm clothed in tightly fitting mail. Then, one by one, it dawned on us that the shiny, silvery scales were part of the skin itself. Many of the crew began to scream, along with their one-legged mate. Obviously old Rovkur had seen such a creature before for his expression was one of horrified recognition.

The ship's company drew their weapons and watched, awe-struck. At the end of the blindly groping arm was a hand, the like of which none but old Rovkur had ever seen or would likely forget. Each of the three digits on that webbed hand was equipped with a cruel-looking six-inch talon. Our nostrils twitched at the vile odor exuded by that hideous thing that was slowly and awkwardly climbing over the gunwale. It seemed to me that the stench was the dank odor of things long dead and rotting in an ocean of primal ooze. It probably came from fathoms below, where time has no meaning and the waters are neither blue nor misty green but horribly black.

A frog-like face appeared above the ship's railing and stared at us. Its bulging fish-like eyes slowly

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scrutinized the deck and the white-faced trembling crew. I, too, was hard put to keep my composure for I had never seen anything like the dread creature before. The eyes worked completely independently of each other. The wide, fanged mouth opened slowly, dribbling sea slime down a beard of tiny, wriggling green tentacles. Suddenly, from that hideous orifice came a gurgling cry, like that of a drowning man. The cry shattered the taut silence on deck. I was sure the creature was some kind of scout; and I was right—for before its cry subsided, more of the submarine horrors were already mounting the rail. Pulling their dripping, slime-covered bodies over the gunwale, they vaulted onto the deck. Wherever their splay, webbed feet squished down, little puddles of plankton and undersea gruel began to form.

Even now the memory of those aquatic monsters fills me with utter revulsion. Each of them was completely covered with round silver scales. Elbows, knees, and wrists all trailed transparent, vascular appendages. The flowing, diaphanous fins reminded me of structures on the bodies of certain rare breeds of tropical fish. A thicker, opaque membrane stretched between each of the three-taloned fingers and each of the six toes. Some of the largest creatures had beaks instead of tentacle-rimmed mouths. All were noseless, with heavy respirating gills flexed behind each of the triangular, fin-like ears. Strangely wrought armor of sea shells, linked by braided seaweed, covered three of the largest creatures. The trio carried huge, horseshoe-shaped, crabshell shields.

What greatly astounded me was the weapons they bore. Each of the creatures bore only one weapon, but it was a horrible one—a huge, barbed hook, a cruel imitation of the kind fishermen bear. Now the whole starboard railing was completely covered by the invaders. Then I saw one of the three armored sea demons raise a taloned claw. As the webbed claw swept downward, its transparent fin streamed out from behind the thing's wrist and out behind the great, curled nautilus-shell helmet. A gurgling cry came from the submarine monarch's finned throat. It was echoed by the ever-increasing throng of oceanic monsters as they lumbered forward, advancing steadily on us.

The Roman legionaries had turned smartly at the first cry from the deck above. Although they still surrounded us with drawn swords, chastising us was now completely forgotten. There was more immediate business. The raging Chrysivius' reddened face turned stark white. Fear-wracked, the eunuch began to squeal hoarsely at the hard-faced young centurion. He was a ludicrous spectacle; grim as the situa-

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tion was, Edeco and I could hardly restrain our laughter as he shouted:

"Your first duty is to protect the property and person of the Imperial ambassador!"

But the officer was not listening. His first concern was to see his men on deck in proper formation to prevent the taking over of the ship by what he kept crying out were Sicilian pirates.

But Edeco and I knew better. Our senses had already warned us that the threat was not a natural one. No pirate warning had sounded through the night. Not one oar had splintered against another tar-seamed hull. No sharp ram had cloven a gaping hole beneath the trireme's water line. The only warning we had had was one man's insane screams. Now only a deathly silence persisted.

I feared nothing on earth, neither man nor beast, but at the thought of having my young soul sucked from me by some night-dark fiend lurking on the edges of existence, a chilling hand gripped my heart. I remembered the winged monstrosities which I and faithful old Strongoak had once driven off. At the thought I drew my poniard from its sheath. Then, patting the tightly rolled parchment I had hidden beneath the leather of my tunic, I dashed for the companionway.

But before I could take two steps, a long, muscular arm shot out, grabbed my shoulder, and spun me around in mid-stride. At first, I blazed in anger; but a moment later, I smiled. For it was Edeco who had stopped me, prevented my foolhardy rush by bringing me to an abrupt halt. Yet I was puzzled. I looked at old Strongoak quizzically. Never had I known my guardian to back away from a battle. Then he spoke, prudently, letting the exact meaning and impact of his words sink into my impetuous brain.

"If," he said deliberately," we *are* dealing with the kind of foe I suspect, we had both better be properly prepared."

I listened carefully for Edeco knew the ways of warcraft better than any other of the warriors I had ever known. He had been brought up among the fiercest fighters and best horsemen of the tribe—and when old Strongoak spoke, all stopped and listened. Thus when he spoke to me as he just had and gestured towards the cargo hold, I was quick to grasp the situation.

III.

I AM CLOVIS, a Gaul, one of the sailors who was aboard the Roman trireme that dreadful day; I am also one of the few who survived to tell his story.

Shortly after the sea demons began to board the ship, my comrades lost all semblance of an organized defense. Rovkur, the One-Legged, his eyes bulging wildly and still screaming, swept the curved tulwar from the sash about his waist and slashed out

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with a long, curving stroke that ended with his slitting his own thick, bearded throat from ear to ear. Bloodied, his twitching corpse fell to the deck with a thud and his crimson-dripping blade stuck, quivering wildly, in the ship's mainmast. A few of the boys clenched their weapons between their teeth and scrambled up the ratlines to sit high above the melee on the uppermost spars of the trireme. But some of the hardier lads formed a ragged circle, drawing their cutlasses and brandishing boarding pikes to try to stave off those nightmarish sea creatures. Yet the submarine demons advanced, their evil-looking hooks slashing the empty air before them.

(As the stench of the attacking demons filled our nostrils, my thoughts strayed to the old legends of the sea, ancient tales I had overheard in many a little seaport town. I had heard the sagas told in many different ways, but the story was always the same. It seemed there had been a city of black necromancers—so it was told—who had been punished for their foul tamperings by being sunk beneath the sea. They were an elder race, not far removed from the day when, it was said, the first life crawled up onto the dry land, and so they were quick to revert. They were cursed—cursed to live beneath the ocean's greatest depths to dream of the day when their ancient sea kings could once again extend their reign over the land. They had been vampires and ghouls in their ancient surface life and now they had reverted even further. Only occasional drownings and shipwrecks kept them appeased. The stories I heard varied in detail, but always returned to one fact. A certain type of shell, hollowed out and used as a sort of horn or whistle, could summon them to the surface. The instrument, it was rumored, had to be accompanied by the proper spells and night-cast runes. Only one type of person could know the incantation or how to use the "sea whistle," one of the same ilk as those he now called.)

. . . Now my thoughts returned abruptly to survival. And none too soon—to see the sweeping and twisting arc of a flashing hook in a silver-scaled arm. My deliberations over the weird mermen's unholy origins vanished in that instant. The barbed hook narrowly missed me, ripping instead into the abdomen of one of my bunkmates, a tall, husky, red-haired seaman from the North. The sea fiend pulled the hook in gracefully, with little apparent effort. My mate screamed wildly; his feet left the deck. Blood and gore showered all of us fighting near and splattered upon the slimy planking. The Norseman, deeply impaled on the huge barbed hook, began to roll toward the railing of the ship. Just as he seemed about to fall into the sea, taking the demon'd hook with

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him, the creature vaulted over the rail and disappeared with his prize beneath the swirling black waters, making a huge splash.

Seeing what had happened to our ruddy-haired shipmate, our lads fought with renewed vigor. Our curved knives parried their sweeping hooks with loud clangs. In desperation we brandished boarding pikes, jabbing them into the gloomy blackness whenever we heard the metallic report of a hook echoing from a well-aimed knife blade. We fought frantically, with savage ferocity. Steel connected with scaly flesh, sending gurgling cries rising into the mists. It was give-and take, with no holds barred. Pikes were wrenched from unwary grips. Huge, sharp blades ripped through shields and flesh with equal abandon. The smell of flowing blood and sea salt mingled everywhere. Loud splashes resounded as the grotesque sea things dragged my struggling mates over the side to a watery doom.

Just then I heard the tramp of marching feet and the shouts of a crowd of men. I looked up to see the gaping centurion and his battle-hardened legionaries marching onto the scene. But it was evident that even they, in the cold chill of the black darkness, were filled with a dread they had never before experienced. Panic-stricken, the officer stammered his commands. The long rectangular shields clanked together smartly as the veterans formed the famous Roman phalanx that had brought them victory around the world. A dense square of steel, bristling with sharp-pointed javelins, was almost invulnerable. Years of combat and endless drill had trained the Romans to form this tightly knit pattern instinctively, no matter how fearful they were or how abnormal the conditions.

The sea creatures advanced steadily as before, but to their dismay the same tactics that had so badly hurt our crew had little or no effect upon the legions of Rome. Two slimy sea demons tumbled toward the rail, finally plunging back to their watery homes with javelins piercing their scaled breasts.

The trio of sea kings, dressed in their crustacean armor, had remained relatively out of the fray. Now the largest of the three, wearing a nautilus-shell helmet with slitted conch visor, barked a command. Pride of authority sounded in his guttural syllables. The attack on the square of steel ceased as the grotesque marine creatures lumbered toward the ratlines. Climbing awkwardly, with webbed fingers and toes slowing their progress, they reached the high cross spars. There they grappled fiercely with my few remaining shipmates who had managed to clamber up to the spars before.

On deck below the melee increased in tempo and accompany-

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ing clangor as the sea fiends resumed their fierce assault. The renewed attack was the signal for their slimy brethren, perched above, to leap down from the mast, screaming horrible, gurgling war cries as they launched themselves into mid-air. Huge hooks rebounded from polished brass shields with tremendous crashes. Some of the air-born monstrosities missed the phalanx of grim-faced legionaries completely, hitting the deck with a sickening crunch. The very air was viscous with the stench of the submarine things, both living and dead. The few surviving members of the crew locked with the mermen in frantic single combat. Hooks rent flesh. Men screamed long, agonized, and horrible cries filled with fear of an unknown doom waiting beneath the waves. As each of the shrieking victims was overcome and dragged over the starboard rail, new strength flowed into my shipmates' exhausted sinews. Hearing those dreadful screams, ending with a great splash, gave each man a bit more energy, the power generated by stark fear.

I had to admire the centurion. Naked sword in hand, his purple mantle of authority wrapped tightly about his left arm for use as a shield, he fought with a savage will for self-preservation. His lips moved constantly, mumbling prayers to every saint and apostle, even to the more ancient gods of his forefathers. The bulging eyes of the thing with which he now fought glowed unnervingly. But that evil, gaping look seemed to fire new determination in the gallant young Roman officer, furious determination to live. Parrying a slash of the barbed hook, he muttered a prayer to the old soldiers' god of ancient Rome. Suddenly I saw the light of an idea glinting in his grey eyes. With a lightning-swift movement he flung his purple cape over the gross, fish-like head, and with a powerful lunge of his short, straight sword, he gutted the dripping creature of the sea. Gurgling and sputtering blood, the sea thing sank to the deck in a heap.

A moment later I heard cries, smelled smoke. Looking up, I saw the two Huns, the young boy, Attila, and the old man they called Strongoak, charging up the companionway brandishing torches.

IV.

EDECO AND I had been below, preparing new weapons for the assault. Fire and water being two opposing elements, we had correctly calculated that the best way to repel the hideous invasion from the deep was with cleansing flame. The submarine creatures were taken aback at the sight of the brightly burning orange flame. Some let out gurgling cries of agony; others sought to throw up their taloned claws to shield their eyes from the dazzling torchlight.

I stuck my smoking, pitch-coated brand into a convenient knothole in the pine decking at

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my feet. I had carefully soaked my finest steel-barbed arrows in pitch and highly flammable oils. In a flash my short bow was singing a song of fiery death.

But Edeco was even quicker. He had already charged in, swinging his curved sword, an ancient tribal war cry on his lips and fury on his face. Several of the sea fiends attacked the old warrior with flashing, slime-covered hooks, swinging wildly. They fell back to the deck or over the rail, gutted by short, swift slashes.

My guardian roared with triumph each time a grisly fish-eyed head or hook-bearing arm was severed by his blade and flew across the deck, leaving a bloody stump to attest to his deft swordplay.

The old warrior had been reborn, turned through the magic of mortal battle into an ancient, avenging god of death. Finally, beaten back by a dozen or more of the gurgling sea horrors, he retreated only to take a more defensive stand. His aim was to protect me while I tried once more to drive back the sea hordes with my arrows.

One after the other, I fitted the straight, black-fletched shafts to my bow and let them fly. They struck with deadly accuracy. The marine nightmares dove into their native depths, seeking the cold balm of the dark waters to extinguish the flaming arrows sticking from scaly hides.

But despite these successes, our position was deteriorating. Edeco and I exchanged appraising glances.

"I don't think we can hold much longer, Strongoak!" I asserted, and my voice was grim and strained.

"Do not fear, Little Eagle!" replied Edeco, reassuringly. "Nothing can stop us! Do you not have a great destiny to fulfill? Besides, I haven't yet learned the contents of the scroll that old stargazer, Onegius, gave you. I cannot go to the Hall of Warriors until my curiosity has been satisfied. Hadur, lend us strength! By the Eternal Blue Sky!" This last oath he muttered as he parried a mightily launched hook slash!

I smiled. Old Edeco always knew exactly the right words to keep my spirits high. I had supreme confidence in my father's old sword brother. Edeco had been Andovar's bodyguard for almost forty years, his loyalty to my father, the chief, bordering on religious fanaticism. Now that love had been transferred to me with a ferocity and ardor utterly unparalleled.

I looked up to see the three nautilus-helmeted sea kings watching me closely. They were appraising my fighting skill as I stood framed by the light of the glowing torches. Sneering defiance at them, I picked up my bow and fired each deadly barbed shaft with blinding speed, nocking the next in one smooth motion.

But they were determined to

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take me, no doubt to appease the dark powers who had summoned them up and whom I had seen in my vision. As if one mind controlled their actions, the trio of sea kings barked the same commands in their low-pitched guttural tongue. Every mer-thing that remained on the gore-splashed deck turned in my direction. With the sea kings in the lead the entire horde of sea creatures lumbered towards Edeco and me.

Nocking one of my three remaining arrows, I drew the gut string of my short bow back to my jaw, sighted down the spine of the dark shaft, and let fly at the nearest oncoming sea king. As if by magic, a black-fletched shaft sprang from a slit in the slimy creature's conch-shell visor. As the two other sea kings watched, the one I had struck fell into a bloody pile of scaly flesh and mollusk armor. A cry of rage went up from the advancing throng.

Suddenly, as they converged upon us; Edeco was upon them, slashing right and left with his giant, blood-stained blade. He leaped in front of me, a look of war pride and battle ecstasy blazing in his old eyes. He was a man possessed. As his flying blade bit through scaled flesh again and again, he burst into an ancient Hun battle song

Oh, Hadur, Lord of the Eternal Blue,
Lend strength to my flashing blade!
For you are sword lord, king of battle, too,
I strike each blow with prayers to you,
Thanking thee for thy aid.
Oh, Hadur, Sword Lord, King of Battlefield,
Lend your swiftness to my steel.
Ha-dur! Ha-dur! Ha-dur! . . .

The last three words the grizzled old warrior chanted in time to three mighty sword strokes.

I was quick to use the time my old companion had won for me. I dropped to one knee. Kneeling, I was in a better firing position. Nocking one of my remaining pair of shafts, I took careful aim at another of the sea kings and let loose. The marine gargoyle dodged with an agility extraordinary for an aquatic creature on dry land. My barbed arrow had merely grazed him. Its feathered tip protruded from the diaphanous membrane of the fin-like structure trailing from the creature's elbow. The fiend howled with a mixture of gurgled rage and pain as he used his other arm to break the burning arrow and draw it through his vascular fin.

He, too, carried an enormous barbed hook, much like those of his subjects, but of heavy, solid yellow gold. The golden hook sliced through the air, heading for my shaven pate. But suddenly there was a loud clang; the curved weapon had encountered the resistance of perfectly aimed cold steel. Once again the ever-faithful Edeco had rushed forward to save me. A look of wild frustration

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swept over the sea king's features. He gasped another gurgling command.

Now the third sea king, largest and most formidable of the trio, came rushing at us. His rage had become uncontrollable, prevailing over good battle sense. His golden hook flashed high over his nautilus-shell helmet. There were but seconds to act.

I sprang into action. I nocked and loosed my last steel-tipped arrow with lightning speed. I had no time to set the pitch coating around the shaft aflame; and my aim was not entirely perfect. Yet it was good enough to save our lives.

Only the notched tip and dark feathers showed from the sea king's right shoulder. His murderous-looking, gilded hook clattered to the slimy deck. Greenish blood stained the creature's sea-shell mail. Loyal retainers held their leader's limp form in their webbed claws. The huge nautilus helmet was removed. Gill slits behind the sea king's tentacled beard pulsed furiously. Only one thing, it seemed, might help him. With a tremendous leap the creatures who held him vanished over the rail with their wounded king.

A shout of hideous, gurgled anger arose from the wild-eyed throng of demons. They attacked us with new ferocity and a savage fury. I was now their chief target, I who had dared defile their three powerful monarchs. Edeco, in particular, was hard pressed. With torch in one great paw and his long curved sword in the other, he tried single-handedly to hold them back, cutting a bloody swath through the charging, slimy bodies.

I was fully aware of our grim predicament. It was only a matter of time before the old warrior would be cut down. I tightened my grip on my poniard, clenching it fiercely in my fist. Dropping my now useless bow, I scooped up the fiery brand at my feet and backed slowly toward the gaping maw of the dark companionway. Edeco belabored two furious, hook-weilding sea things at sword's point.

As the old warrior parried a mighty hook slash, he took a faulty step backward into a pool of blood and slime. A flashing, barbed hook glinted in the dim torchlight as it started its descent. An evil-fanged grin showed beneath a beard of writhing tentacles. The frog-face seemed even more obscene as the batrachian eyes bulged and gleamed with blood lust.

In my hand I still carried my razor-sharp poniard, its needle point resting between my thumb and forefinger. As the sea creature neared Edeco, I flicked the dagger through the air with a deft, snapping motion. It seemed to take an eternity to whirl through the gloomy darkness. Then a foot and a half of the finest damask steel glistened red as it stuck in a

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protruding eye.

The arching hook finished its deadly downward plunge, barely skinning the mailed back of old Edeco. He was already bleeding from a dozen or more vicious wounds. His newly repaired mail shirt was in shreds once more and his conical, fur-rimmed helmet was dented beyond repair. He watched the remaining sea things bounding over his kneeling form with great frog-like leaps—seeking only to get to me.

Edeco struggled weakly to regain his feet. He screamed curses of frustration as his attempts to rise failed. He looked dizzy from much blood loss and the numbing fatigue of spent sinews. Then he fell back down to the damp deck, beating his fist and sword against the blood-covered planking. He cried out like some great wounded beast unable to protect its young. For I was being overcome.

Now the things from the fathomless depths were all about me. I held my smoldering brand fiercely, in both hands, swinging it with all my might. Hungry, batrachian mouths drew closer, drooling their pleasure at my seemingly hopeless plight. Each time I swung the flaming torch to one side, a barbed hook or taloned claw swiped at the undefended other.

Tears were rolling down Edeco's cheeks as he watched helplessly, fighting to regain his equilibrium. The torn ranks of the bedraggled Romans were equally useless. They could not reorganize in time to be of any help to me. Nor did they care enough to risk their lives in trying.

Edeco cursed them for cravens. Yet there was little they or he could do. The leering faces ringing me drew closer. Smelling their foul breath brought me a little more strength, and I swung my fiery torch a bit harder. But it was only for a moment. My strength was rapidly ebbing. I understood now that they were only toying with me, like a great tomcat with a helpless, struggling mouse.

Now a sharp talon sliced at my exposed shoulder. A gaping tear appeared in my leathern tunic. It had offered no more resistance than so much brittle parchment. Warm red blood spurted from the six-inch gash running from my shoulder to the muscles of my chest.

Lashing out in a burst of pain and rage, I dashed my blazing torch in the face of the creature that had slashed me. The sea thing screamed agonizedly, his slimy features scorched beyond recognition. But my anger had betrayed me. The torch no longer burned! Before I fully realized it, the extinguished brand was roughly torn from my grasp. I thought now only of Andovar, my dead father. Soon we would be reuinted in the other world, where great Hadur ruled the Eternal Blue, resplendent among

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his fallen warriors.

"Well, at least I will perish in battle," I mused. Yet I would have much preferred it a clean battle with other men, not nightmare fiends from the ocean floor. Then the shiny things closed in.

As my torn leather tunic fell away, suddenly the ancient, rune-inscribed scroll became visible. The heat and exertion of the savage battle had flattened the aged document considerably. The pressing had made the elder rune signs affixed to the thick waxen seal come into plain sight. The weird eidolon of an older time glowed faintly in the mists surrounding the Roman ship. The sea demons lumbered forward on wide, dripping, splay feet. Suddenly they pointed taloned fingers in awe and shock. They started to gasp in ghastly surprise. The eerily glowing insignia had had some strange effect on the horde of undersea fiends.

They began to cough, gurgle, and emit choking sounds as if suffocating. Some threw scaly forearms in front of their eyes. Others continued to stare, blanching as if transfixed, but unable to move. Many of the mer-things began to howl and whine. The spell that had animated these submarine horrors and allowed them to breathe above the surface of the water had been broken. Their webbed feet made damp, squishing noises as they staggered and stumbled across the corpse-strewn deck. They began to vault both the gunwale and the railing in groups of two or three, all in frantic haste.

I rubbed my smoke-filled eyes in disbelief. Edeco was up and harrying the fleeing sea things as best he could in his still groggy state. I wished I still had my arrows left. Finally, bloody and bedraggled, Edeco staggered over, a look of dazed bewilderment stamped on his face. His voice was dry and reduced to a harsh whisper.

"What happened, Eagle?"

"I'm not sure I know, Old One! It was not my fate to die today. Hadur must have spared me for a greater mission!"

—HARVEY SCHREIBER

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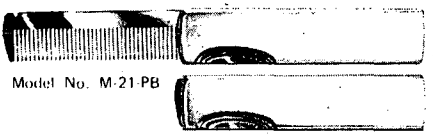

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BARRY N. MALZBERG
TRANSFER

Herwith, a fresh look at an old legend, with a sting in its tail . . .

Illustrated by TONY GLEESON

I HAVE MET the enemy and he is me. Or me is he. Or me and he are we; I really find it impossible to phrase this or to reach any particular facility of description, the peculiar and embarrassing situation in which I find myself now lurching quite out of control, ravaging its way toward what I am sure will be a calamitous destiny and yet I have always been a man who believed in order, who believed that events no matter how chaotic would remit, would relent, would suffer containment in the pure limpidity of The Word engraved patiently as if upon stone. I must stop this and get hold of myself. I have met the enemy and he is me.

Staring into the mirror, watching the waves and the ripples of The Change, seeing in the mirror that beast take shape (it is always in the middle of the night; I am waiting for the transference to occur during the morning; or worse yet at lunch hour, in the middle of a cafeteria, waves may overtake me and I will become something so slimy and horrible even by the standards of midtown Manhattan that I will cause most of the congregants to lose their lunch), I feel a sense of rightness; it must have always been meant to be this way. Did I not feel myself strange as a child, as a youth, as an adolescent? Even as an adult I felt the strangeness within me; on the streets they stared at me with a knowledge which could not have possibly been my own; women turned away from me with little smiles when I attempted to connect with them, my fellow employees here at the Bureau treated me with that offhandedness and solemnity which always bespeaks giggles in private. I know what they think of me; I have spent a lifetime in solitude, gauging these reactions not to be a fool and I know that I am separated from the run of ordinary men as these men are separated from the strange heavings and commotion, ruins and darkness which created them. Staring in the mirror. Staring in the mirror I see.

Staring in the mirror I see the beast I have become, a thing with tentacles and spikes, strange

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loathsome protuberances down those appendages which my arms have become, limbs sleek and horrible despite all this devastation, limbs to carry me with surging power and constancy through the sleeping city and now that I accept what I have become, what the night will strike me, I am no longer horrified but accepting, one might even say exalted because I always knew that it would have to be this way, that in the last of all the nights a mirror would be held up to my face and I would see then what I was, and why the mass of men avoided me. I know what I am, those calm, cold eyes staring back at me in the mirror from the center of the monster know too well what I am also and turning them from the mirror, confronting the rubbled but comfortable spaces of my furnished room, I feel the energy coursing through me in small flashes and ripples of light, an energy which I know, given only the chance it needs, could redeem the world. The beast does not sleep; in my transmogrification I have cast sleep from me like the cloak of all reason and I spring from these rooms, scuttle down the three flights of the brownstone to the street and coming upon it in the dense and sleeping spaces of the city, see no one, confront no one, as I move downtown to enact my dreadful tasks.

The beast does not sleep therefore I do not sleep; at first the

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change came upon me once a week and then twice but in recent months it has been coming faster and faster, now six or seven times a week and furthermore I can *will* it; involuntary at first, overtaking me like a stray bullet, it now seems to be within my control as my power and facility increase. A latent characteristic, then, some recessive gene which peeked its way out shyly at the age of twenty-five, first with humility and then with growing power and finally, as I became accustomed to the power, it fell within my control. I can become the beast whenever I wish now; it is not the beast but I who pokes his way from the covers during the hours of despair and lurches his way to the bathroom; standing before that one mirror, I call the change upon myself, ring the changes and the beast, then, confronts me, a tentacle raised as if in greeting or repudiation. Shrugging, I sprint down the stairs and into the city. At dawn I return. In between that time, I make my travels.

My travels, my errands! Over manhole covers, sprinting as if filled with helium (the beast is powerful and with endless stamina), in and out of the blocks of the west side, vaulting to heights on abandoned stoops, then into the gutter again, cutting a swathe through the city, ducking the occasional prowl cars which come through indolently, swinging out of sight behind gates to avoid garbage trucks, no discovery ever having been made of the beast in all the months that this has been going on . . . and between the evasions, I do my business. I mean, the beast does his business. I must separate the beast and myself because the one is not the other and I have very little to do with the beast although, of course, I am he. And he is me. Attack them in the darkness.

Seize hapless pedestrians or dawn drunks by the throat, coming up from their rear flank, diving upon them then with facility and ease, sweeping upon them to clap a hand upon throat or groin with a touch as sure and cunning as any I have ever known and then, bringing them to their knees, straddling them in the gutter, I—

—Well, is it necessary for me to say what I do? Yes it is necessary for me to say; these recollections are not careless nor are they calculated but merely an attempt to set the record straight, the rumors, reports and evasions about the conduct of the beast having reached the status of full-scale lies (there are not a crew of assassins loose in the streets but merely one; there is not a carefully organized plan by gangs to terrorize the city but merely one beast, one humble animal wreaking his justice and his havoc) so it is to be said that as I throttle the lives and misery out of them, I often turn them over so that they can confront the beast, see what is doing it to them and that I see in

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their eyes past the horror, the heartbreak, the beating farewell-signal of their mortality . . . beyond that I see something else, an acceptance so enormous as to almost defy me in all its aspects, almost a religious acceptance, the peace that passeth all understanding darting through their eyes and finally passing through them and exiting in the last breath of life as with a crumpling sigh they die against me. I must have killed hundreds, no I do not want to exaggerate, it is in the high eighties anyway: at first I kept a chart of my travels and accomplishments but when it verged up into the high twenties I realized that this was completely insane, leaving physical evidence of any sort of my accomplishments and furthermore, past the ninth murder or the nineteenth there is no longer a feeling of victory but only *necessity;* it is purely business. All of it has been purely business.

Business in any event for the beast; he needs to kill as I need to breathe, that creature within me who I was always in the process of becoming (all the strangeness I felt as a child I now attribute to the embryonic form of the beast, beating and huddling its growing way within) takes the lives of humans as casually as I take my midday sandwich and drink in the local cafeteria before passing on to my dismal and clerkly affairs at the Bureau, accumulating time toward the pension credits that will be mine after twenty or thirty years. The beast needs to kill; he draws his strength from murder as I do mine from food and since I am merely his tenant during these struggles, a helpless (but alertly interested) altar which dwells within the beast watching all that goes on, I can take no responsibility myself for what has happened but put it all squarely on the beast where it belongs. Perhaps I should have turned myself in for treatment or seen a psychiatrist of some kind when this all began but what would have been the point of it? They would not have believed me, they would have taken me as a harmless lunatic and the alternative, if they did believe me, would have been much worse: implication, imprisonment, fury. I could have convinced them, I know that now; when I became strong enough to will myself into the becoming of the beast I could have, in their very chambers, turned myself into that monster and then they would have believed, would have taken my fears for certainty . . . but the beast, manic in his goals, would have fallen upon those hapless psychiatrists, internists or social workers as he fell upon all of his nighttime victims and what then? What then? He murders as casually and skillfully as I annotate my filings at the Bureau; he is impossible to dissuade. No, I could not have that. The beast and I, sentenced to dwell together throughout eternity or at least through the

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length of my projected lifespan; there may be another judgment on this someday, of some weight but I cannot be concerned with that now. Why should I confess? What is there to confess? Built so deeply into the culture—I am a thoughtful man and have pondered this long despite my lack of formal educational credits—as to be part of the madness is the belief that confession is in itself expiation but I do not believe this; the admission of dreadful acts is merely to compound them through multiple refraction and lies are thus more necessary than truth in order to make the world work. I believe this. I do believe it.

I have attempted to have discussions with the beast, this is not easy, but at the moment of transference there is a slow, stunning instant when the mask of his features has not settled upon him fully and it is possible for me, however weakly, to speak, "why must you do this?" I ask him, "this is mass murder, these are human beings, it is really quite dreadful you know," my little voice piping weakly as already my own force diminishes and the beast, reconstituted, stands before the mirror, waving his tentacles, flexing his powerful limbs and says then (he speaks a perfect English when he desires although largely he does not desire to speak), "don't be a fool; this is my destiny and besides *I* am not human so this is not my problem." This is unanswerable, already muted by the transformation I burrow within him and the beast takes to the streets, singing and crouching, ready once again for his tasks. Why does he need to murder? I understand that his lust for murder is as gross and simple as my own for less dreadful events: it is an urge as much a part of him as that toward respiration. The beast is an innocent creature; immaculately conceived; he goes out to murder as his victims go out to drink; he sees no shades of moral inference or dismay even in the bloodiest and most terrible strangulations but simply does what he must with the necessary force, never more. Some nights he has killed twenty to thirty. The streets of the city, in the dawn, are littered with his victims.

But his victims, his victims have, most of them, been waiting for murder so long, dreaming of it, touching it in the night (as I touch the beast) that this must be the basis of that acceptance which passes through them at the moment of impact: they have been looking, these victims, for an event so climactic that they will be able to cede responsibilities for their lives and here, in the act of murder, they have at last that confirmation. Some of them embraced the beast with passion as he made his last strike, others have opened themselves to him on the pavement and pointed at their vitals. For the city, the very energy of the city or so I believe

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this now through my musings, is based upon the omnipresence of death and to die is to become at last completely at one with the darkened heart of a city constructed for death. I become too philosophical. I will not seek to justify myself further.

There is no justification: what is merely *is*, the beast having taught me this along with so much else. Tonight we come upon the city with undue haste; the beast has not been out for two nights previous, having burrowed within with a disinclination for pursuit, unavailable even to summonings, but now, at four a.m. in this coldest of all the nights of winter, he has pounded at me screaming for release and I have allowed him his way with some eagerness because (I admit this) I have missed the thrill of the hunt and now the beast races down the pavements, his breath a plume of fire against the ice and at the first intersection we see a young girl, paused for the light, a valise clutched against her, one hand upraised for a taxi that will not come. An early dawn evacuee from the city or so I murmur to the beast, perhaps it would be best to leave this one alone since she looks spare and there must be tastier meat in the alleys beyond . . . but the beast does not listen, he listens to nothing I have to say, this being the core of his strength. My own trepidation is as nothing to the beast; he sweeps onto his own purposes in a way which can only make me admiring. He comes upon the girl then, and takes her from behind.

She struggles in his grasp like an insect caught within a huge, indifferent hand, all legs and activities, grasping and groping, and the beast casually kicks the valise from her hand, pulls her into an alley for a more sweeping inspection, the girl's skull pinned against his flat oily chest, her little hands and feet waving and she is screaming in a way so dismal and hopeless that I know she will never be heard and she must know this as well because the screaming stops, small pleas and moans which had pieced out the spaces among the screams stop as well and with an effort of strength, she twists within the beast's grasp then, hurls herself against his chest and then looks upward toward his face, to see, at least, the face of the assassin about which she must surely have dreamed, the bitch, in so many nights. She sees the beast. The beast sees her.

I know this girl.

She works at the Bureau, is a fellowclerk two aisles down and one over to the left, a pretty girl, not indifferent in her gestures but rather as so few of the girls at the Bureau are lively and kind, kind even to me, her eyes never droll but sad as she looks upon me. I have never spoken to her other than pleasantries but feel, *feel* that if I were every to seek her out, she would not humiliate me. "Oh," I say, within the spaces of

(cont. on page 56)

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THE DEVIL HIS DUE

JOE HALDEMAN

What follows is an unusual opportunity for readers to watch the skills of a gifted writer at work. In 1970 we published Joe Haldeman's "I of Newton" (June), a short, clever tale about a mathematics student and his deal with the Devil—or, to be more precise, a demon. When Night Gallery *went on* TV *a few seasons later, Haldeman decided to have a try at recasting the story as a television script. He taught himself the* TV *script form and remolded "I of Newton" into "The Devil His Due." The script failed to sell to* Night Gallery, *but appears here, now, as an example of how a short story can be recast in script form, and—since Haldeman has revised many aspects of the story—as a second-thoughts version of the original vignette . . .*

ESTABLISHING SHOT: *A young man, obviously a student, sitting at a large desk, scribbling furiously. The only source of light is a harsh study lamp. There are signs that he's been at it for a long time: overflowing ashtray, books and papers piled in disarray all over the desk, floor littered with crumpled-up paper. What we can see of the rest of the room shows it to be a typical bachelor-student pad; a cheap furnished apartment, bookcases improvised from bricks and boards, crammed with texts and paperbacks.* STUDENT *has a short, shaggy beard and hair that is carelessly, rather than stylishly, long. On a small table beside the desk are a coffeepot, percolating, and a big, cheap-looking alarm clock that says 4:00.*

SOUND: *Crickets chirping outside, coffeepot perking.*

MCU STUDENT *as he suddenly looks up from pad, stares at the wall for a moment, then slaps pencil down and leans back in the chair, rubbing his eyes and yawning.*

SOUND OUT

STUDENT
MUSING

The integral of dx over the cosine to the n of x is sine x over n minus one times the cosine to the n minus one of x plus n over n minus one—

STOPS ABRUPTLY

MCU STUDENT different angle

STUDENT
WITH FEELING

Oh, God. (SITS UP) N minus *two* over n minus one times the integral . . . .

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SOUND: Crickets very low. STUDENT stands and CAMERA FOLLOWS as he goes to pour himself a cup of coffee. TIGHT on STUDENT as he replaces coffeepot and voice OFF says:

DEMON
AMUSED
Good morning.

STUDENT drops cup with a crash. SOUND OUT.

STUDENT
Uh . . . who?

MEDIUM TWO SHOT *as* DEMON *steps into light. He is a tall, handsome man in evening dress, with a clear basso voice.* DEMON *leans against wall and produces a cigarette from nowhere. He breathes on the end and it lights itself.*

DEMON
Some have called me Baal. That's close enough.

INTERCUT STUDENT AND DEMON.

STUDENT
STILL CONFUSED
Ah. Um.
LOOKS AROUND VAGUELY
I was *sure* I had another cup.

DEMON
EXTENDS HAND CASUALLY
Here.

BCU DEMON's hand and SOUND: metallic "ping" as coffee cup appears, dangling from his pinky.

MCU STUDENT as he takes cup cautiously.

STUDENT
SERIOUSLY
Thank you.

CAMERA FOLLOWS *as* STUDENT *returns to desk and carefully places cup in front of himself. He stares at cup, then at* DEMON, *then back at cup again.* BCU *as he shakes his head gently from side to side.*

STUDENT
TO HIMSELF
They told me not to take those pills. They said, "Sam, what you need is more sleep, not less."

SIPS COFFEE REFLECTIVELY
But I had work to do.

TO DEMON
Do you suppose, if a person doesn't get enough sleep to supply his regular quota of dreams . . . he starts to dream while he's still awake?

INTERCUT DEMON AND STUDENT

DEMON
WITH MOCK SYMPATHY
I suppose it's possible.

STUDENT
And you're just a, an hallucination.

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DEMON

SMILING FOR FIRST TIME, SHOWING POINTED TEETH

No.

STUDENT

ALSO SMILING

Come on, Mr. Baal. Admit it.

DEMON

SHAKES HEAD

No.

STUDENT

STARES ONE LONG SECOND, THEN LAUGHS

Guess I have to go along with the gag. What, you came for my soul?

DEMON

SHRUGS

You summoned me.

STUDENT

I? Summoned you?

DEMON *describes circle in air with his forefinger. Inside the circle, a picture of* STUDENT *sitting at his desk, mumbling:*

IMAGE OF STUDENT

. . . cosine to the n minus one of x plus n over n minus one—Oh, God! . . . n minus *two* over n minus one times the integral . . .

DEMON

SMUGLY

That semantic garbage probably would have worked as a summons even if it *didn't* have a nice little blasphemy worked in the middle.

STUDENT

LAUGHS, A LITTLE HYSTERICALLY

All right, all right. I'll go along with the gag . . . bring on the parchment! The sterilized pin! That's the deal, isn't it? I sign away my soul, in Type O, in return for some (LAUGHS) consideration? Three wishes?

DEMON

CONDESCENDINGLY

I'm afraid you've been misled by your folklore and literature. All wishful thinking—I don't give you anything. We go through a silly little ritual, and then I *take*.

STUDENT

UNCERTAIN SMILE

You take.

DEMON

EXPRESSIONLESS

Take.

STUDENT

SOBERING

My soul?

DEMON

Call it what you like.

STUDENT

ALMOST BELIEVING

You're actually the devil?

DEMON

SLIGHTLY IMPATIENT

No. As I explained—Baal. The demon, Baal. Administrative Assistant In Charge of Souls, Procurement and Delivery.

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STUDENT
BEMUSED
Even in Hell, a bureaucracy.

DEMON
We *invented* bureaucracy. (PAUSES) To the business at hand. (PAUSES) This would be so much simpler if I could just take your soul and go. But we made a deal a long time ago.

STUDENT
A deal?

DEMON
NODS
With *Him*.

STABS THUMB SHORT JERK SKYWARD, HOLDING IT CLOSE TO HIS BODY
And no way we can get out of it.

CAMERA FOLLOWS as DEMON begins pacing, hands held behind his back, almost talking to himself.

DEMON
I have to let you ask three questions—that's where you get that "three wishes" nonsense—three questions pertaining to my abilities. My limitations, if you can find any.

MEDIUM TWO SHOT *as* DEMON *stops pacing and places both hands on desk, leaning close to* STUDENT. STUDENT *inches away a little.*

DEMON
CONFIDENTLY
And after the questions, you have to ask me a fourth question, which I can't answer; or set for me a task, which I can't perform.

STUDENT
CONVINCED NOW, NERVOUS
And if I fail?

DEMON
(STILL LEANING) SOFTLY
First question.

STUDENT
No!

DEMON
SMUGLY
Now, now . . . I have to play by the rules, and I expect you to do so as well.

DEMON *steps back. Where his hands had been on the desk, two little fires break out. He snatches percolator and pours coffee on the fires.*

DEMON
BRISKLY
Sorry. If you fail, I take your soul, and deliver it to the boss. Then I dispose of, uh, well, I *eat* the leftovers.

STUDENT
CAUTIOUSLY
Leftovers?

DEMON

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That's right. (SMILES, SHOWING POINTED TEETH) The leftovers.

STUDENT
Ugh!

DEMON
SOMEWHAT DEFENSIVELY
Different strokes for different folks.

STUDENT
UNCERTAINLY
First question. Can—

DEMON
WAGS FINGER
No, no—*second.*

STUDENT
All right. Can you . . . lie to me?

DEMON
SCOWLS
No, damn it. (BRIGHTENS) But if I *could* lie, the answer could be "no."

STUDENT
If . . . no. (PAUSE, THINKING) No.

DEMON
Don't get nervous, now.

DEMON *produces another cigarette and lights it as before. Coughs discreetly.*

DEMON
I don't have all eternity, you know.

STUDENT *looks up, not impressed.*

DEMON
GETTING IMPATIENT
Come on, come on.

STUDENT
LITTLE SMILE; HE'S THOUGHT OF SOMETHING
You *do* have a weakness, and you're afraid that, given enough time, I'll figure it out.

DEMON
Nonsense!

STUDENT
GESTURING
Have a cup of coffee while I think.

DEMON
AUTOMATICALLY
Never touch it. (SHARP LOOK) None left, anyhow. (IMPATIENTLY) Look, if I give you a hint, will you hurry it up?

STUDENT
Maybe. You owe me a question after cheating me out of that first one, anyhow.

DEMON
Hmph. (PAUSES) I've worked with you mathematicians before. Most of them waste a question—or their soul—asking me some trivial thing like the four-color problem, or Fermat's Theorem. Don't bother.

STUDENT

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INTERESTED
Fermat's Theorem?

DEMON
Yeah. Any demon worth his salt and sulfur can prove that it's true.

STUDENT
SCOFFING
Come on, now. That's a different thing than these . . . parlor tricks you've been doing. Some of the best mathematical minds in—

DEMON
Watch!

DEMON *gestures grandly and a blackboard materializes on the other side of the* STUDENT. *It's covered with mathematical equations in tiny cramped handwriting.*

STUDENT *gets up.* LS *past* DEMON *to* STUDENT *and blackboard.* STUDENT *scans the material written on the blackboard, touching his finger beside several of the equations, one after the other.*

STUDENT
AS FINGER TOUCHES
Hmm. Yes, that checks, sure does . . . say . . . clever. *Clever.*

STUDENT *stops at last few equations (bottom right hand corner) and stares for several seconds.*

MCU STUDENT *as he turns to* DEMON.

STUDENT
WITH RESPECT
You *did* prove it.

INTERCUT DEMON and STUDENT

DEMON
Nothing. Really—not compared to what I *can* do.
GRUFFLY
Anyway, I saved you a question. Why don't you hurry it up?

STUDENT
SLOW SMILE
It *is* impressive, but I hadn't planned to ask anything like that.

DEMON
JEWISH-MOTHER IMPATIENCE/PATIENCE
So. *Ask* me.

STUDENT
Is there anyplace in the world . . . in the universe . . . in all of reality, where you could go and not be able to find your way back here?

DEMON
EVIL LAUGH
You'd banish me, eh? The answer is *no*. I could go to the Andromeda galaxy, or back to the Second Punic War, and be back here before you could

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blow your nose.

DEMON *folds arms and stands very tall.*

DEMON
TRIUMPHANTLY
Now! Your question, your command!

STUDENT *laughs and looks at* DEMON *in a sly way.*

STUDENT
QUIETLY (RESTRAINED MIRTH)
Get lost.

DEMON
GASPS
Get—(TAKES A DEEP BREATH AND LOOKS VERY ANGRY)

FLASH, CRASH and puff of SMOKE and DEMON appears in traditional guise: black cape, red tights, horns and tail. He ROARS and clutches impotently at STUDENT who backs away. MEDIUM TWO SHOT as DEMON begins slowly to shrink. He quiets down and looks around nervously, wringing his tail. When he's only a couple of feet tall, STUDENT comes over and stares at him with detached curiosity. DEMON stamps his feet and whines piteously with rage.

DEMON
LIVID
You and Harry *Truman*!

Quiet "pop" and DEMON *disappears.*

CAMERA FOLLOWS STUDENT *as he walks back and sits down at his desk.* STUDENT *looks at the spot where* DEMON *disappeared, looks at blackboard still loaded with equations, looks back at spot, and then straight ahead, thoughtfully. He* SNIFFS *and wrinkles his nose.*

STUDENT
ALMOST UNDER HIS BREATH
Sulfur dioxide.

MEDIUM SHOT *as* STUDENT *crosses to window and opens it to let the smell out.* SOUND: *crickets (very little time has passed). He returns, sits on corner of desk and regards the blackboard.* CU STUDENT *as he laughs wryly and shakes his head.* CAMERA FOLLOWS *as he returns to chair and sits for a moment, lost in thought, chin resting on palm, elbow on desk.*

STUDENT
MUSING
Next time . . . next time maybe the four-color problem . . . or squaring the circle . . .

CUT TO:

Stylized set of Hell: black chunks of rock jutting up through a roiling blanket of (dry ice-type) vapor. Lights flickering erratically off-camera and very muted SOUND: *voices moaning, sighing; demons cackling; flames and some viscous material boiling.*

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Enter DEMON, *shuffling along, looking nervously left and right, still holding tail foolishly.* VOICE *of* DEVIL OFF *is evil yet jovial.*

DEVIL
Mr. B!

DEMON *drops his tail, looks apprehensive.*

DEMON
Yes, uh, Boss, uh . . . Baal reporting back from—

DEVIL
INTERRUPTING
Yes, I know. I saw the whole sordid mess. (WHEEDLING) Really set yourself up, didn't you?

CU DEMON, *scared.*

DEMON
Yessir.

DEVIL
ENJOYING IT
Fell for the old "get lost" gag, eh?

DEMON
Yessir.

DEVIL
VERY FRIENDLY
Baal, I think it's time you had a vacation.

DEMON
TERRIFIED
No! No, Boss . . . I'll, I'll do better, I promise . . . (JUST A HINT OF DEFIANCE) Besides, I had a vacation not even a thousand years ago.

DEVIL
I know. You earned that one, too. (PAUSE) "Get lost," indeed!

DEMON is wringing tail again. He notices what he's doing, starts, and drops it.

DEVIL
BACK TO BUSINESS
Well, all right. One more chance—a lepidopterist in Santa Barbara, I think. Beelzebub will fill you in on the details; he's at the assignment desk right now.

DEMON
Thank you, sir. (TURNS TO GO)

DEVIL
Oh, and Baal . . .

DEMON
UNCERTAIN
Yes . . . sir?

DEVIL
Don't worry about our friend . . . he's the type who's bound to try again. And this time . . . *I'll* answer!

CU DEMON, smiling.

DEMON
And he'll find out . . . (CHUCKLES)

BCU DEMON's *face.* SOUND OUT.

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DEMON
The rules are a little different. (LAUGHS)

DEVIL *joins in with booming sepulchral laugh.*

LAP DISSOLVE TO:
STUDENT, *still with chin in palm, staring into space.*

STUDENT
WOOLGATHERING
Lagrange's Theorem, Mersenne's numbers . . .

FADE TO BLACK.
—JOE HALDEMAN

Transfer (cont. from page 47)

the beast, trapped and helpless as I look upon her, "oh, oh."

"No!" the girl says, looking upon me, "oh no, not you; it can't be you!" and the beast's grasp tightens upon her then, "it can't be you! don't say that you're doing this to me!" and I look down upon her then with tenderness and infinite understanding, knowing that I am helpless to save her and thus relieved of the responsibility but saddened too, saddened because the beast has never caught a victim personal before and I say in a small voice which she will never hear (because I am trapped inside), "I'm sorry, but it's got to be done, you see; how much of this can I take anymore?" and her eyes light with understanding, they darken with understanding, they lighten and darken with the knowledge I have imparted and the pressure begins then, the pressure that in ten seconds will snap her throat and leave her dead and in that instant, the freezing colors of the city all around us, we confront one another in perfect isolation, the girl and I, our eyes meeting, our touch meeting and absolutely nothing to be done about it then, her neck breaks and in many ways (I will admit everything) this has been the most satisfying victim of all.

—BARRY N. MALZBERG

ON SALE NOW IN THRILLING SF

THE BIG ALL-STAR ISSUE featuring stories by **HARLAN ELLISON, THE VENGEANCE OF GALAXY 5, KEITH LAUMER, GREYLORN, ROBERT SILVERBERG, POSTMARK GANYMEDE, BEN BOVA, THE INEVITABILITY OF LIFE, JACK SHARKEY, ONE SMALL DRAWBACK, RANDALL GARRETT, GIFT FROM TOMORROW,** AND **SAM MOSKOWITZ, ROBERT HEINLEIN: MAN, MYTH OR MONSTER?**

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L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers

EL-RON OF THE CITY OF BRASS

On nights 566 to 578, Shahrazad entertained her sultan with the tale of the City of Brass. She told how a Caliph sent an expedition under Emir Musa to explore in Africa. There they found a vast deserted castle, a jinn imprisoned in a pillar, and finally the City of Brass itself, with all its people lying dead in the streets and houses.

The expedition gathered a load of loose treasure, met a friendly black tribe, and at last returned home in triumph. There is sentimental Arabic poetry about the shortness of life, which causes hearers to weep or swoon. There are quaint gaffes about the events of the Days of Ignorance—that is, the times before Muhammad. Thus we read of such pseudo-historic personages as "Darius the Greek, king of Alexandria."

On the whole, the tale is not one of Shahrazad's best. Perhaps the stories of Sindbad, just preceding, had drained her faculties. The deaths of the folk of the City of Brass, for instance, are never explained. But then, as we go back in time, we find that in fiction generally, inconsistencies, non sequiturs, and untied loose ends become more and more frequent. We are much fussier about such things than they were in medieval Egypt, where the *Thousand and One Nights* took form.

The City of Brass became the springboard for one of a series of fantasy novels in John W. Campbell's great, lamented *Unknown (Worlds)* by one of imaginative fiction's most colorful practitioners, Lafayette Ronald Hubbard—writer, entertainer, warrior, adventurer, and cultist. In the four and a half years of *Unknown's* existence, L. Ron Hubbard furnished eight fantasy novels for this magazine, one as "René Lafayette," the rest under his own name. Of these eight, three can surely be classed as heroic fantasy, while the fourth is on the borderline. A fifth appeared later in another magazine.

Such a contribution ranks Hubbard among the literary swordsmen and sorcerers. In his

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case, however, the cult leader overshadows the fantasy writer. The swordplay and sorcery experienced by his heroes are no more fantastic than Hubbard's own career.

WHEN I FIRST knew Hubbard, around 1940, his background was picturesque but not mysterious. He was born in 1911 in Nebraska, the son of a commander in the U.S. Navy. As a child he lived in Montana on a ranch owned by his grandfather and went to high school in Helena. Later, the family brought him to Washington, D.C., where he attended a YMCA preparatory school and, for a brief period ending in 1932, George Washington University.

During the next five years, Hubbard tried several occupations. He served a hitch in the Marines. He seems to have visited the Far East, either during his Marine service or earlier when his father served a tour of duty in those parts. Hubbard played the banjo and sang on the radio in California. He had some flying experience. He organized a vacation cruise to the Caribbean Islands. At a gathering in New York, he met H. P. Lovecraft (probably on the latter's last visit, in January, 1936). Afterwards, Lovecraft said: "That is a remarkable young man!"[1]

Hubbard wrote a Western novel, *Buckskin Brigade*, which appeared in 1937 and was quickly followed by more Western and sea stories. Next year, he broke into Campbell's *Astounding* and blossomed into a mass-production writer. His stories appeared in nearly all the science-fiction magazines and in other outlets for popular fiction. He wrote under his own name and under the pseudonyms "René Lafayette" and "Kurt von Rachen." For several years before Pearl Harbor, he compared in volume and versatility with Robert E. Howard at the peak of his production.

In his late twenties, Hubbard was a tall, well-built man with bright red hair, a pale complexion, and a long-nosed face that gave him the look of a reincarnated Pan. He arranged in his New York apartment a curtained inclosure the size of a telephone booth, lit by a blue light bulb, in which he could work fast without distraction.

During the winters of 1939-40 and 1940-41, Hubbard lived in an apartment on New York's upper West Side. His wife and two children remained in Seattle, whither he returned for his summers. He had a boat on Puget Sound and made cruises up the foggy coast of British Columbia and the Alaskan panhandle. On one such voyage, while he and a friend were on their way to some fishing, Hubbard lassoed a large brown bear, which he espied swimming. The bear climbed aboard, forcing Hubbard and his companion to flee to the cabin until the ship ran aground and the bear departed.

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Fletcher Pratt used the incident in Chapter XXVI of his fantasy novel *The Well of the Unicorn*.

A man of overpowering personal charm, Hubbard became a member of Fletcher Pratt's wargame circle, which played a naval war game with balsa models of real warships on the scale of 55′ = 1″. The battleground was the Pratts' living-room floor until the crowd became too large; then they hired a hall on East 59th Street.

At these gatherings, Hubbard showed a bent for practical jokes. He gave widely varied impressions of himself. Some thought him a Fascist because of the authoritarian tone of certain stories. But one science-fiction writer, then an idealistic left-liberal, was convinced that Hubbard had profound liberal convictions. To others, Hubbard expressed withering disdain for politics and politicians, saying about the imminence of war: "Me, fight for a *political* system?"

HUBBARD WROTE FOR *Unknown* four of the five stories considered here. Three of them were "The Ultimate Adventure" (April, 1939); "Slaves of Sleep" (July, 1939); and "The Case of the Friendly Corpse" (August, 1941).

In each of these novels, the protagonist starts out as an antihero: a weak, shy, timid, prissy, pedantic youth, sent by magic to another parallel world, where he is forced to become a roistering, swaggering adventurer. In each tale, the other "dimension" is vaguely Oriental. It is implied that its language is Arabic. But Hubbard knew nothing of that tongue; hence many names of the denizens of these imagined worlds are, Arabically speaking, impossible.

In "The Ultimate Adventure," Stephen Jepson, left a destitute orphan, is beguiled by a mad professor into visiting one of an infinite number of universes. Stevie is placed in an electric chair before a copy of *The Arabian Nights*, open to "The City of Brass." When the professor closes the switch, Stevie finds himself in the City of Brass itself. Exploring a tower, he unwittingly sounds a huge gong. Thereupon the comatose folk of the city awaken.

Escaping a gigantic ifrit or jinn, Stevie returns to the laboratory but is unwittingly sent back to the City of Brass, this time with a pistol. He is condemned to death as a suspected ghoul, shoots his way out, falls in with a gang of real ghouls who collect people's heads to eat, and rescues the rightful queen of the city from captivity in an ifrit's castle. When the wicked professor comes seeking treasure, Stevie turns the tables on him.

It's all good fun. This novel came out in paperback in 1970 from Berkley Medallion Books. It was combined in one volume with another of Hubbard's *Unknown* novellas, the psychiatric horror tale "Fear."

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"Slaves of Sleep" is perhaps the best of the trio, with the most sustained power of imagination. It is the only one of these stories, so far as I know, that has appeared alone in book form. It was published in cloth in 1948 by Shasta Publishers, with a charming jacket by the late Hannes Bok. More recently, Lancer Books issued it in paperback.

This time, the protagonist is a poor little rich boy, better heeled than Stevie Jepson but no more effectual. Jan Palmer, heir to a shipping fortune, ignores the business and moons about in a sailboat while crooked executives loot the shipping line.

Among Jan's heirlooms is a large copper jar, sealed with the Seal of Solomon. Another wicked professor sneaks into Jan's house and opens the jar. (Hubbard's contacts with academe evidently failed to give him a high opinion of it.) Out comes an ifrit imprisoned there by King Solomon. True to form, the ifrit kills the evil professor, curses Jan with eternal sleeplessness, and vanishes, leaving Jan to be accused of the professor's murder.

The first time that he goes to sleep in jail, Jan learns what the ifrit meant. Instead of ordinary dreams, Jan finds himself in a parallel world, where people form the lower caste and jann,[2] the upper. The locale is much like the Barbary Coast of the Mediterranean in the seventeenth century. Jan inhabits the body of a sailor called "Tiger," a roisterer with a passion for practical jokes. Thenceforward, Jan alternately awaits his trial in jail on the earth he knew and has madcap adventures in the alternate world. In time, the characters of Jan and Tiger merge, to the improvement of both.

It also transpires that other people whom Jan knew in his waking life—his aunt, the crooked executives, and the girl whom he timidly worships from afar—also have *Doppelgänger* in the world of sleep. With the help of a magical ring, which opens all bonds, Jan triumphs. The ring, however, is the main flaw in the story, because it makes Jan's victories look childishly easy. For instance, he beats a hostile navy by simply commanding the ships to fall apart. Where Robert E. Howard saved himself brain-racking labor in plotting by endowing his heroes with Herculean brawn, which got them out of all predicaments, Hubbard achieved the same end by providing them with invincible magical gadgets.

The third novella, "The Case of the Friendly Corpse," has some of the most original ideas and the funniest passages of any of Hubbard's stories, but it lets the reader down hardest at the end. Some of its plot elements were borrowed. In the 1930s, Dr. John D. Clark (who edited Howard's Conan stories for the original cloth-bound publication) and a friend named Mark Baldwin con-

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cocted a prospectus for an imaginary College of the Unholy Names. In a clever imitation of the usual deadly-dull style of such publications, they solemnly listed courses in the black arts, *e.g.* Advanced Thaumaturgy 112, Elementary and Advanced Transformations (Magic 56). . . . Delinquent students (*e.g.* those caught sleeping alone) were to be dropped—from Skelos Tower. ("Skelos" was borrowed from Howard.)

In 1941, Clark lent the typescript of this fabrication to Hubbard to use in a story. In the tale, Jules Riley is about to get an advanced college degree and become an instructor in ancient languages—a fate that he (and presumably his creator) regards as a fate worse than death. At the crucial moment, Jules falls into another dimension. There he learns that his *alter ego*, a student at the College of the Unholy Names, has used his magic to swap bodies with Jules.

Fletcher Pratt and I had just finished our pre-war Harold Shea stories; "The Castle of Iron" had appeared in *Unknown* two issues earlier. Hubbard played a literary joke by having Harold appear before one of Jules's fellow students:

> "He said he was a magician from another world [explains the student, who has been demonstrating a wand that turns into a super-serpent] Well, I was just about to show the dean this double wand so I said this would be a good time to try it out and see if it really worked. I said I'd make a snake and then he'd rear up a monster and we'd see which one won. Well, he seemed kind of upset when I threw down the wand and it began to grow and he yelled some kind of chant that sounded like mathematics and the snake just kept on growing. I expected to see his monster any minute because he'd said he was a magician from another world and I figured he must be pretty good. But, by golly, the snake just grew up and then grabbed him up and ate him up before I could do anything about it."[3]

Some fans were indignant at Hubbard's so brusquely bumping off a colleague's hero. Pratt and I thought of writing a story to rescue Harold from the serpent's maw and turn the tables, but after some floundering we gave it up. Another writer's *mise en scène*, we found, cramps the imagination so severely that fancy plods when it should soar. In the end, we ignored Hubbard and sent Harold on to other milieux.

The title of "The Case of the Friendly Corpse" comes from an incident wherein Jules is forced to bring a dead man back to life. He, however, gets the revivification spell mixed up with one for winning friends and influencing people. Hence the corpse, only half restored to life, is filled with demonstrative love for Jules, to the latter's unavailing horror.

It is a good, lively tale until the climax, which comprises a horrible example of *deus ex machina*. Jules, stripped of his magical powers and facing the vengeful

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host of sorcerers with a puny sword, overcomes them by simply renouncing magic and opting for the Christian God. Then his sword cuts through them and their monsters as through warm butter. To top it off, King Arthur and his knights, not mentioned before, gallop out of nowhere to chase the paynims away.

This ending is as incongruous as would be the finale of Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls* tacked on a novel by P. G. Wodehouse. Moreover, whereas some fantasy writers like T. H. White and C. S. Lewis, themselves devout Christians, can handle the Christian theme, the cynical Hubbard's exploitation of the Christian motif merely irks even the agnostic reader.

Hubbard also wrote a borderline swordplay-and-sorcery story, "Typewriter in the Sky," which ran as a two-part serial in *Unknown*, beginning with the issue of November, 1940. Mike de Wolf, aspirant pianist, visits the flat of Horace Hackett, hack writer, who is pounding out a yarn of piracy on the Spanish Main in 1640. Mike gets an accidental electric shock and finds himself living in Hackett's story. He is cast as the villain, the Spanish admiral Miguel de Lobo. Knowing what happens to Hackett's villains, Mike-Miguel uses frantic stratagems to outwit Hackett, the quasi-god of this world.

It is all good fun but not to be taken seriously. The synthetic world of Hackett's imagination has no magic; merely the careless anachronisms and inconsistencies, such as a Steinway piano, that Hackett puts into his story. When Hackett tears up a chapter and begins it over, Mike's situation instantly changes to match. Since the tinsel artificiality of the scene created by Hackett's mind is a basic assumption of "Typewriter," the reader is amused but not strongly engaged. At the end, Mike, back in his own body, muses:

> Ah, yes. The fate. It was his luck to meet somebody in a story and then return without her. It was his luck. But you couldn't expect the breaks all the time. You couldn't ask luck to run your way forever. He had had her for a little while, in a land ruled by a typewriter in the clouds. And now he was out of that and there was no type—
>
> Abruptly Mike de Wolf stopped. His jaw slackened a trifle and his hand went up to his mouth to cover it. His eyes were fixed upon the fleecy clouds which scurried across the moon.
>
> Up there—
>
> God?
>
> In a dirty bathrobe?[4]

WHEN THE United States entered the Second World War, Hubbard was commissioned in the Naval Reserve and assigned to sea duty, first on anti-submarine craft and later on a cargo ship, the USS *Algol*. When Lieutenant Hubbard appeared in Philadelphia in the winter of 1944, the Heinleins,

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the Asimovs, and the de Camps made a night of it with him. I cannot blame him for showing slight vexation at my having half a stripe on him, since he had at least been at sea, while I had been navigating a desk. We were all fascinated when Hubbard turned the lights low, struck up Heinlein's guitar, and in a splendid voice sang *Fifteen Men on a Dead Man's Chest*.

After the war, Hubbard lived for a while in California and resumed writing. His stories, as before, fell into two groups. One consisted of light, humorous tales of adventure, zestful and amusing but carelessly thrown together. The other group was made up of more serious stories wherein the hero is a lonely leader, a solitary natural aristocrat who (like E. R. Eddison's heroes) has to kick the benighted common clods around for their own good.

Hubbard wrote for *Astounding* a series of fairly good stories about an immortal interplanetary physician, Doc Methuselah, who flies about the galaxy stopping plagues and toppling tyrants. Some medically trained readers took exception to Hubbard's medical ideas.

In 1950, after Dianetics had burst upon a vulnerable world, Hubbard wrote a sequel to "Slaves of Sleep" This was "The Masters of Sleep," which appeared in FANTASTIC ADVENTURES for October, 1950. Something goes awry with the original characters of "Slaves of Sleep." Jan Palmer, losing his double consciousness, reverts to his timid self in the waking world and to the foolishly reckless Tiger in the world of sleep. The same fate befalls his mate, ex-secretary Alice in the former world and dancing girl Wanna in the latter.

Again a marvelous talisman, the Two-World Diamond, appears to muddle and finally to solve Jan-Tiger's problems. Throughout, the diamond is being lost, found, stolen, and re-stolen. There are good scenes of naval action in the square-rigged, muzzle-loading, pike-and-cutlass era.

Alas for the story! Hubbard undertook not only to entertain the reader but also to further his Dianetics movement and to promote certain political causes, one of which was the Al-Can Highway. Moreover Hubbard, who had prided himself on being apolitical, had discovered the menace of Communism.

Hence Jan's waking world has two leading villains. One is a mad psychiatrist, Doctor Dyhard, who persists in rejecting Dianetics after all his abler colleagues have accepted it. He believes in prefrontal lobotomies for everyone and plots to get control of Jan for that purpose. The other scoundrel is a thieving lumberjack named Chan Davies, a member of the Friends of Russia Communist International Objectors Social Hall Lumberjacks/ Local No. 261, with designs on the magical diamond. Older readers may recall that a

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left-wing science-fiction fan named "Chan" (for Chandler) Davis was then in the news.

This mixture of political and pseudo-scientific evangelism proved fictionally disastrous. Hubbard's psychiatrists and Communists are such puerile caricatures that, even if his premises were granted, his treatment would not persuade any but the weakest minds.

FROM THE LATE 1940s to date, Hubbard's own saga is as fantastic as anything he ever put into his stories. For a while he was in a business partnership with John W. Parsons, an explosives engineer and occultist.

Parsons's life is a story by itself. His cult began in the 1930s as a branch of the Order of Oriental Templars of Aleister Crowley,[5] self-styled "wickedest man in the world"—occultist, poet, big-game hunter, drug addict, dope peddler, bisexual satyr, and professional screwball. Members of the Los Angeles branch of the O.T.O. met in the mansion of a magnate. They entered a secret meeting room by means of a trapdoor and a ladder. There a gauze-clad priestess of the cult climbed out of a coffin to perform the mystic rites. My colleagues Tony Boucher and Jack Williamson, who attended one of the meetings, reported that it was respectable to the point of dullness, unless one shuddered over the cult's laborious blasphemies.

As I understand it, the theory of the cult leader—a Briton named Wilfred Smith—was that the world was too much run by extroverts. Therefore he proposed to get all the introverts together and organize them (as if introverts could be assembled and organized) into a conspiracy to seize control from the extroverts. Soon, however, the priestess died. Smith eloped with Parsons's wife and, with one thing and another, the cult became inactive.

After the Second World War, Parsons revived the cult in an old mansion in Pasadena. But, when the rites called for a naked pregnant woman to leap nine times through a sacred fire on the lawn, neighbors called the police. In 1952, Parsons perished when he dropped a bottle of picric acid on the floor of his laboratory.

Hubbard's partnership with Parsons had ended a few years earlier under acerbate conditions. Then came the Dianetics-Scientology movement.

Several people have written on this movement in detail; their books are listed in the notes.[6] A prudent man, however, approaches these events with caution. More than one author has complained of harrassment from outraged Scientologists by abusive letters and threatening telephone calls. George Malko, who rashly devoted a whole book to Scientology, has been subjected to a lawsuit for six million dollars.

This was but one of a large

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number of libel suits filed by Scientologists in recent years. Defendants include the American Medical Association, the *Washington Post*, and *The Times* of London. When they sued Paulette Cooper, author of *The Scandal of Scientology*, for a million and a half, she sued them right back for 15.4 million.[7] While, so far as I know, none of these suits has ever come to trial, they effectively discourage the publication of views unsympathetic to Hubbard and his followers.

In *Astounding* for May, 1950, appeared an article by Hubbard, "Dianetics, the Evolution of a Science." This told of Hubbard's new system of psychotherapy and the radical theories by which he explained its effects. This article was followed by the book *Dianetics, the Modern Science of Mental Health*. The book opens with the claim: "The creation of dianetics is a milestone for Man comparable to his discovery of fire and superior to his invention of the wheel and the arch." Hubbard averred that his system of therapy would cure all mental and most physical ills, making the subject a "clear"—a kind of superman.[8]

Whereas Hubbard's fictional style was always fluent, literate, and readable, his non-fiction proved incomprehensible—at least to me. A possible reason for this use of obscure language was expressed by W. S. Gilbert:

> And every one will say
> As you walk your mystic way,
> If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for *me*,
> Why, what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be![9]

IN *Dianetics*, HUBBARD started with the concept of an "engram." This term, invented by the German psychoanalyst Richard Semon early in this century, means a permanent impression left on protoplasm by a stimulus. For instance, said Hubbard, all sorts of harmful engrams are impressed on a human fetus during gestation as the mother is raped, kicked, or beaten by her husband, or as she attempts abortion by knitting needles. All these events, the book implies, are normal in average married life.

Associated with Hubbard in the Dianetics movement were John W. Campbell and Dr. Joseph A. Winter, a physician specializing in endocrinology and psychosomatic medicine. Together they set up a Hubbard Dianetics Research Foundation in Elizabeth, New Jersey.

Campbell, a brilliant man with a scientific education, who became the greatest of all science-fiction magazine editors, had found active scientific research uncongenial and had made writing and editing his career. One can only speculate why, for many years, he lent himself to one unscientific or borderline idea after another. I suspect that, failing to become a famous scientist himself, he harbored the ambition to be at

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least the discoverer of such a scientist.

The book *Dianetics* became a best seller despite the fact that psychologists, psychiatrists, and other medical men heatedly denounced it as "amateurish and potentially dangerous meddling with serious mental problems."[10] *Time* and *Newsweek* described Dianetics as "the poor man's psychoanalysis," since the Dianetic system of auditing superficially resembles Freudian psychoanalysis.

After a year of nationwide expansion and controversy, the Dianetic movement fell on hard times. Heresies and schisms arose. Lurid accusations were exchanged. Branches seceded. Doctor Winter broke with Hubbard in 1950; Campbell disavowed Dianetics in 1951; the Research Foundation in Elizabeth disappeared.

Hubbard moved to Wichita, where he set up a second foundation with a local businessman, Don Purcell, as partner. Hubbard had shed his first wife and married Sara Northrup, who had been a friend of Parsons. In 1951, Sara divorced Hubbard.[11]

In 1952, the foundation in Wichita suffered financial reverses and was bought up by Purcell, whereupon he and Hubbard parted with recriminations. As his third wife, Hubbard chose Mary Sue Whipp, who has ever since taken an active rôle in his enterprises. Moving to Arizona, Hubbard propounded the more advanced doctrine of Scientology, based among other things on doctrines of reincarnation and the extraterrestrial origin of man. Revelation followed revelation, until Scientology made Dianetics look drab by comparison. A magazine summarized these teachings thus:

> Everyone, it seems, is 74 trillion years old, and has been reincarnated over & over in cycles ("spirals"), which have been getting shorter as evolution has speeded up. The current spiral began a mere 35,000 years ago. Everyone has a "theta being," which represents his essential thought-energy and becomes associated with a "MEST" body (another Hubword made from the initials of matter, energy, space, time) . . . . If a subject has a pain in his jaw, it may be that in an earlier spiral he was a clam. If this pain is associated with fear of falling, he must have been a clam that was picked up by a bird and dropped on the rocks.[12]

Extending his operations to the United Kingdom, Hubbard set up his new movement on a tighter basis than the old. He claimed that he had written a book, *Excalibur*, but that when four of the first fifteen persons who read it went insane, he humanely withdrew it from circulation.

For a time, Hubbard manifested himself in Saint Hill, an English mansion once owned by a maharaja. Here, at tea time, he had a butler serve him a Coca-Cola on a silver tray. He also castigated the psychiatrists who had received *Dianetics* with less than enthusiasm. In a magazine article,

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he wrote:

If you point out something you don't like to a psychiatrist he promptly puts you on his list as insane and calls up his contacts in the police department and military intelligence to have you raided or arrested as a dangerous agitator. . . . He knows he can do nothing to really help and can only make somebody quiet. He is operating on a failed purpose to help others. And it makes him savage and morose. He even doubts his own sanity and often winds up completely mad in his own institutions. . . . If psychiatry had paid attention to its ethics of practice and had organized to prevent wild malpractice, it would not today be so vulnerable to attack. Documented orgies in sanitariums, sexual interference with patients to say nothing of the beatings, torturings and murders which have now come to light are all indications of what can happen when practice is not guided along decent and humane lines by professional ethics.[13]

In the 1960s, Hubbard converted his movement into the Church of Scientology, thus securing the protection (in the United States) of the First Amendment against governmental interference and gaining tax exemptions. Scientology fought the Food and Drug Administration to a standstill over the use of the so-called E-meter (electropsychometer). This device, used in Scientological interviews, resembles a drastically simplified polygraph or lie detector. It is made of a pair of tin cans, a galvanometer, and some wires. Hubbard released photographs of himself using the E-meter on a tomato, claiming that he was thus put *en rapport* with the tomatovian mind.[14]

In 1971, Federal District Judge Gesell held that, while the gadget looked to him like "quackery," its use was still protected as a religious rite by the First Amendment. Hence the FDA was ordered to return the confiscated E-meters.[15]

Over the years, Scientology has grown in size and influence to a degree that some find alarming. Hubbard has been declared *persona non grata* in several countries.[16] At last accounts, he was cruising the Mediterranean in his "Sea Org," a fleet of five small commercial and naval craft converted into yachts, and keeping tabs on his followers by a corps of uniformed "ethics officers." He is thought by some to become immensely rich. While none but he knows the details of his finances, his enterprises have obviously not impoverished him.

As a writer, Hubbard had some of Robert E. Howard's gifts: a natural bent for storytelling; a fine sense of pace, color, and action; and, more than Howard, an ebullient sense of humor. One must admit that, whatever their faults, few stories furnish more pure *fun* than some of Hubbard's *Unknown* novels.

Hubbard also suffered from Howard's faults of slapdash haste and carelessness, which clutter his

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tales with damaging crudities and inconsistencies like those of his character Horace Hackett. If he had taken more time and trouble. . . . But then he would have been somebody else, with different faults and virtues. And those who have made Scientology into a formidable Church Militant would have had to seek their transcendental wisdom elsewhere.

NOTES:

1. Frank Belknap Long (personal communication).

2. *Jann* is the Arabic plural of *jinn*.

3. *Unknown*, V, 2 (Aug. 1941), p. 31.

4. *Unknown*, IV, 4 (Dec. 1940), p. 162.

5. For Crowley, see L. S. & C. C. de Camp: *Spirits, Stars, and Spells* (Canaveral Pr., 1966), pp. 174-78.

6. Martin Gardner: *Fads and Fallacies in the Name of Science* (Putnam's, 1952; revised, Dover Pub. Co., 1957); Helen O'Brien: *Dianetics in Limbo* (Whitmore Pub. Co., 1966); Alan Levy: "Scientology," in *Life*, Nov. 15, 1968; George Malko: *Scientology, the Now Religion* (Delacorte Pr., 1970); Paulette Cooper: *The Scandal of Scientology* (Tower Pubs., 1971); Daniel Cohen: *Masters of the Occult* (Dodd, Mead, 1971); Robert Kaufman: *Inside Scientology* (Olympic Pr., 1972); Christopher Evans: *Cults of Unreason* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1973). For the history of Hubbard and Scientology, I recommend the last of these.

7. *N. Y. Times*, Jan. 20, 1974, pp. 1, 51; Paulette Cooper (personal communication).

8. For the results of this alleged creation of clears, see Cohen, p. 180; Evans, p. 49; Levy; Malko, p. 56.

9. Gilbert & Sullivan: *Patience*, Act I.

10. *N. Y. Times Book Review*, Jul. 2, 1950, p. 9; Aug. 6, 1950, p. 22; *Time*, Aug. 23, 1968, p. 40.

11. For the illuminating features of this case, see the *N. Y. Times*, Apr. 24, 1951, p. 32; Jun. 13, 1951, p. 18; *Time*, May 7, 1951, p. 45.

12. *Time*, Dec. 22, 1952, p. 34.

13. Cohen, p. 183f; Evans, p. 61; L. Ron Hubbard: "L. Ron Hubbard Breaks Silence," *Mayfair Magazine* (London).

14. *Time*, Aug. 23, 1968, p. 40; *Newsweek*, Sep. 23, 1974, p. 84.

15. *N. Y. Times*, Jul. 31, 1971, p. 20; *Phila. Evening Bulletin*, Jul. 31, 1971, p. 20.

16. *N. Y. Times*, Mar. 16, 1969, p. 14; Apr. 14, 1969, p. 33; Jan. 20, 1974, pp. 1, 51; (*Daily Sketch* (London), Mar. 11, 1967, p. 1; *The People* (London), Mar. 19, 1969, pp. 1, 13; Cohen, pp. 193-96; Evans, pp. 82-92; Malko, pp. 77-90.

—L. Sprague de Camp

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Reviewed by Fritz Leiber

THE YEAR'S BEST HORROR STORIES: SERIES II, edited by Richard Davis, Foreword by Christopher Lee, DAW Books, 1974, $1.25, 207 pages.

In dealing with stories of supernatural horror—that is, tales of fear of the unknown and fascinated wonder at it—one can easily lose sight of the fact that their basic function is to give us goose flesh, an eerie chill, a shiver of dread, a *frisson* (that useful French word). This is something more than physical fear. The threat of torture by the Gestapo or the imminent prospect of being cut up by a maniac with a razor-sharp butcher knife does not give us gooseflesh, but rather a sick feeling at the pit of the stomach, a desperate impulse to flee or strike out, and a paralysis that suppresses the latter. It is the difference between being locked in a room with a real black panther and imagining there might be a black panther silently crouched just behind a closed door.

Also, this is something that is dulled by repetition. To get a genuine *frisson*, we must be taken by surprise. So I won't reveal the plot of the only novel to give me a genuine *frisson* in ten years: *The Dance of the Dwarfs* (Mayflower Books, 1971, first published by Michael Joseph, 1968) by Geoffrey Household, that able, rather narrowly talented narrator of man hunts such as *Rogue Male* and *The Watchers in the Shadows*. I'll only say that it touched off my dread of a race of hidden "little people" like nothing since I first read Arthur Machen. (This happened to me on page 42, for what that's worth.) And that he explores the region between natural and supernatural terror, showing to his own satisfaction how Coleridge's famous rule of Don't Look Back Over Your Shoulder applies whether it's a "Frightful Fiend" or a man-eating tiger you're scared you'll see. (This same region also turns up in *The Poison Oracle* by Peter Dickinson, Pantheon, 1974, $5.95, a brilliant science fiction detective story I simply must mention, which has such fringe-*frisson* lines in it as "There are two worlds, and both are true. A man may throw his spear in the sun-world and hit nothing, but in the moon-world that spear strikes into his enemy's liver.")

In the last half-century, the supernatural horror novel has come a long way, not invariably to its advantage. Let's take as stages Lovecraft's *The Whisperer in Darkness* (with his novelette "The Shunned House" thrown in for reference purposes),

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William Sloan's *To Walk the Night*, *Rosemary's Baby*, and *Burnt Offerings* by Robert Marasco, Dell, 1974, $1.50. The first two are already also classifiable as science fiction, which is interesting. Then take sex. None, of course, in *The Whisperer*; a love story an integral part of the tale and its terror in *To Walk the Night;* semi-explicit sex scenes in *Rosemary's Baby;* a fully described one in *Burnt Offerings.*

Next, haunted houses. A full third of "The Shunned House" is devoted to its history. In *Rosemary's Baby* we get a lot of occult anecdotes about the old Manhattan apartment building Polanski recreated brilliantly in the film. But although a haunted house dominates *Burnt Offerings* and is even its chief character, we get nothing of its history; it springs up full-blown in all its overpowering physical detail like a movie set—which is really astonishing, as if in these technologic modern times history were no longer a matter of any interest.

This last novel, written with a painstaking modern brilliance, fails as a supernatural thriller because it tips its hand too soon. We know the house is going to get the protagonists. The only question is: When? Also, the plot is that of a humorous short weirdie: an old couple with a decaying grand mansion near New York City keep it in physical and spiritual repair by renting it every second summer to a house-infatuated woman who will not only fix and clean it furiously for two months, but also be trapped by it forever, so that her life force revives the place until a new "house mother" is needed. This, publisher's blurb to the contrary, is *not* the way to create "a novel of the supernatural rivaling *The Turn of the Screw* in the artistry of its construction of evil." But the writing is so good by fits and starts that we get several ghosts, they might be called, of genuine *frissons* along the way: a black car and silent chauffeur concealed in overgrowth, a magicked swimming pool, and a certain ornate doorknob. Readable.

All the foregoing is to prepare the way for a review of Richard Davis' excellent anthology first published in England by Sphere. He has carefully searched American as well as British publications for the best in current supernatural horror stories, and he has turned up a few very good ones eked out by others that are at least competent, with all of them adding up to a striking display of the diverse directions the story of supernatural terror has taken in our times.

Brian Lumley briefly abandons his beloved Cthulhu Mythos to give us "David's Worm," a humorous tale of a boy's horrendous hobby, neatly based on extrapolated science. There's also his "Haggopian," an unobjectionably Cthulhoid story of marine horrors described in scientific detail and with a protagonist reminiscent of the flamboyant, wealthy international masterminds who were the opponents of James Bond. Not bad.

Basil Copper's "The Knocker at the Portico" is a thoroughgoing pastiche of the Victorian tale of grue up to and including a denouement IN CAPITAL LETTERS. I don't see how it really helps horror to put it in the last century, but the movies surely think so. Interesting.

The wide range of the editor's search for the best is shown by "Like Two White Spiders," a new variant on the old horror theme of independently animated hands, translated

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from the Dutch by its author, Eddy Bertin. Horrid enough, though the explanation hardly convinces.

In "The Price of a Demon," Gary Brandner brings in a feature typical of our new society: the witch an accepted member of it. Handsome, living in an attractive apartment, giving classes, displaying high professional ethics, Aurelia Cord might well be, say, Sybil Leek. The story, succinctly told, reminds me of the numerous fine little stories published in *Unknown*.

"Haunts of the Very Rich" by T. K. Brown III (the author's name part of the atmosphere!) is one of those workmanlike weird stories *Playboy* publishes from time to time. (Also see David Ely's "The Light in the Cottage" in the October 1974 issue.) The posh and plush setting seems incontestably real, but—I won't spill the beans.

Kit Pedler does a beautiful job of evoking a ghostly atmosphere, even to the underplayedly sinister title, "The Long-Term Residents." Then the tale takes a surprising(!?) turn.

"The Old Horns" by J. Ramsay Campbell is one of his new non-Lovecraftian stories about semi-liberated young people and a very nasty area near a British beach. I couldn't make out exactly what was going on at times, but whatever it was, it was very unwholesome.

Since they turn up in other stories of his, I conclude that Campbell has a particular horror of balloons with human faces bobbing silently about. Every writer of weird stories seems to have his or her own private dreads, which may be fairly common or utterly idiosyncratic. I share with many the dread of spiders. Lovecraft probably shared with even more the horror of marine things and the slimy. Judging from the stories she selected for her omnibuses, Dorothy Sayers found a special horror in the ghosts of the mentally retarded. While Sprague de Camp has written that he still gets a *frisson* from the lines:

The weird ululation of fiends
On the brackish waters of time. . .

I suppose all stories carry the marks of private experience, but they can be particularly conspicuous in stories of fear.

Campbell is also represented by "Napier Court," a very brilliant and sensitive story of the Robert Aickman sort, though more vivid and darting in style than the latter usually manages. The Aickman aspect is that the main character—here a poignantly depicted young female flutist—is in such a flighty state, so near the nervous breaking point, that we must forever be asking ourselves "Insanity? Or genuine weird phenomena?" But who cares? when such a memorable peak of terror and desperation is attained.

"The Animal Fair" by Robert Bloch is another of those well-crafted Playboy stories, this one very good—an account of a physical horror so intense that it transcends itself and becomes supernatural. Expert atmospheric use is made of a sleasy carnival, unhealthily caged beasts, and a summer storm where "Thunder growled, prowling the sky."

Finally, there is "The Events at Poroth Farm," a long novelette by T.E.D. Klein from *Beyond the Dark Gateway*. It is simply one of the most frightening stories in the Lovecraft manner I've ever read. *Not* a Cthulhu Mythos tale, but one hewing closely to Lovecraft's theories of the supernatural horror story and using some of his favorite elements: an actual coun-

(cont. on page 119)

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Dorian Hawkmoon was joined in battle by the ghosts of old comrades, thrust out of time and commanded to ensure their own lives by destroying his—a cruel jest indeed on the part of his enemy, Kalan of Vitall—but the cruellest irony was yet to come . . .

COUNT BRASS
(CONCLUSION)

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

Illustrated by HARRY ROLLAND

SYNOPSIS

Then the Earth grew old, its landscapes mellowing and showing signs of age, its ways becoming whimsical and strange in the manner of a man in his last years.

—The High History of the Runestaff

And when this History was done there followed it another. A Romance involving the same participants in experiences perhaps even more bizarre and awesome than the last. And again the ancient Castle of Brass in the marshy Kamarg was the centre for much of this action . . .

—The Chronicles of Castle Brass

IT IS FIVE YEARS after the fall of the Dark Empire, and of those heroes who had served the Runestaff against the Dark Empire and finally defeated Granbretan in the great Battle of Londra, only two survived: DORIAN HAWKMOON and his bride, YISSELDA, Countess of Brass. COUNT BRASS is dead, slain by a spearman of the Order of the Goat while himself slaying three barons—Adaz Promp, Mygel Holst and Saka Gerden. OLADAHN of the Bulgar Mountains, beastman and loyal friend of Hawkmoon, had been hacked to pieces by the war axes of the Order of the Pig. BOWGENTLE, unwarlike and philosophical, had been savaged and decapitated by Pigs, Goats and Hounds, of which there were twelve. HUILLAM D'AVERC, a mocker of everything and disbeliever in his own health, lover of QUEEN FLANA, had died ironically: riding to his love he was slain by one of her soldiers who thought she was being attacked.

In the ensuing five years, Hawkmoon and his wife had two children, MANFRED and YARMILA, and they settled comfortably into a domestic life in Castle Brass while elsewhere the world seemed scrubbed clean of the evil of the Dark Empire, that kingdom having been given to the rule of Queen Flana.

But appearances are deceiving, and among new rumors of the revival of the beast cults comes a more pernicious story: That the ghost of Count Brass haunts the marshlands of

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Kamarg, telling those he meets that Hawkmoon is a coward and his killer—a story which grows and spreads until Hawkmoon himself hears the tale is disbelief.

Hawkmoon goes out into the marsh to confront and debunk the "ghost"—but discovers to his dismay that the figure he meets does indeed seem to be Count Brass—albeit a somewhat younger Count Brass than he'd seen last—and a man sorely troubled by both doubts and a sense of his own lost destiny, for to him it appears he lives in a land of mists and perpetual twilight, a land of the unliving and the undead.

When Hawkmoon attempts to persue him, he loses Brass in the marsh—and nearly loses his own life as well, when his horse slips from a narrow trail and falls into the bog. Here Hawkmoon, weighted by his armor and unable to free himself, gives himself up for dead—but is saved by CAPTAIN JOSEF VEDLA and Yisselda, the former tossing him a rope with which he is pulled free of the muck.

When Hawkmoon returns to the marsh on another evening to meet once more with the ghost of Brass, he goes to a small hill on which stands a ruin of immense age—a ruined church of many long centuries earlier. But Brass is not alone: he is accompanied by three others.

To Hawkmoon's disbelief, they are D'Averc, Bowgentle and Oladahn. But each is younger than when he'd seen them last, and each believes himself dead—their deaths from incidents which Hawkmoon realizes did not in fact cause them to die. Each is charged with killing Hawkmoon, yet all are reluctant, although none had yet met him before their "deaths" and neither did they know each other be-

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fore meeting here in this land of—to them—limbo.

Hawkmoon talks to them and learns that each arrived in this place through the services of an "oracle"—a sort of speaking pyramid about the height of a man; glowing, diamond-like, hovering above the ground. It has the power to appear and vanish at will.

In talking with these men, Hawkmoon establishes that each has been taken from an earlier time—when the Dark Empire was still growing—and that an escaped villain from the fall of that Empire must be behind their appearance here.

Brass takes them to where the "oracle" appears, and calls it, claiming to have killed Hawkmoon as requested. But the glowing pyramid, when it appears, demands proof in the form of Hawkmoon's corpse. Hawkmoon realizes that he knows the "oracle's" voice: it is that of KALAN OF VITALL, a scientist of the Dark Empire who had apparently died by suicide in the Empire's collapse. It appears that he can control time to some extent, speeding up days and slowing down nights, to convince the four that they inhabited a netherworld. Hawkmoon confronts Kalan, holding him at bay with a firelance—and Kalan takes the only escape afforded him: the pyramid disappears.

Hawkmoon says he knows of only one place to turn for help in dealing with this trickster of time—for his four companions are stranded out of their own times. They must journey across seas and desert to Soryandum and the Wraith-folk—who were once Hawkmoon's friends and helped him defend Castle Brass by shifting it among the dimensions.

They take passage on *The Romanian Queen*, but Kalan materializes his pyramid on deck, where he is confronted by Oladahn, and deals with him by sending him back to his own time—leaving only four of the adventurers to complete the trek to Soryandum. . . .

CHAPTER THREE

The Journey to Soryandum

SOON AFTER THE incident on deck the wind sprang up with great force so that it seemed that a storm might be in the offing and the captain ordered all sails on so that he could run before the storm and get into Behruk with all possible speed.

Hawkmoon suspected that the captain's haste had more to do with his wish to unload his passengers than his cargo, but he sympathised with the man. Another captain, after such an incident, might have been justified in throwing the remaining four overboard.

Hawkmoon's hatred for Kalan of Vitall grew more intense. This was the second time that he had been robbed of his friend by a Dark Empire lord and, if anything, he felt this second loss more painfully than he did the first, for all that he had been, in some ways, more prepared for it. He became determined, no matter what befell, to seek out Kalan and destroy him.

Disembarking on the white quayside of Behruk, the four took fewer precautions to hide their

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identities here. Their legends were familiar to the folk who dwelt along the Arabian Sea but their descriptions were not so well-known. Nonetheless they lost no time in going speedily to the market-place and there purchasing four sturdy camels for their expedition into the hinterland.

Four days riding saw them used to the lolloping beasts and most of their aches gone. Four days riding also saw them on the edge of the Syranian desert, following the Euphrates as it wound through great sand-dunes, while Hawkmoon looked often at the map and wished that Oladahn, the Oladahn who had fought at his side against D'Averc in Soryandum, when they were still enemies, was here to help him recall their route.

The huge, hot sun had turned Count Brass's armour into glaring gold. He dazzled the eyes of his companions almost as much as the pyramid of Kalan of Vitall had dazzled them. And Dorian Hawkmoon's steel armour shone, in contrast, like silver. Bowgentle and Huillam D'Averc, who wore no armour at all, made one or two acid comments about this effect, though stopped when it became evident that the armoured men were suffering considerably more discomfort in the heat and, while waterholes and the river were close, took to pouring whole helmets-full of water through the necks of their breastplates.

The fifth day's riding saw them passed beyond the river and into the desert proper. Dull yellow sand stretched in all directions. It rippled sometimes, when a faint breeze blew across the desert, reminding them, intolerably, of the water they had left behind.

The sixth day's riding saw them leaning wearily over the pommel's of their high saddles, their eyes glazed and their lips cracked as they preserved their water, not knowing when next they might find a waterhole.

The seventh day's riding saw Bowgentle fall from his saddle and lay spreadeagled upon the sand and it took half their remaining water to revive him. After he had fallen they sought the scant shade of a dune and remained there through the night until the next morning when Hawkmoon dragged himself to his feet and said that he would continue alone.

"Alone? Why is that?" Count Brass got up, the straps of his brass armour creaking. "For what reason, Duke of Köln?"

"I will scout while you rest. I could swear that Soryandum was near here. I will circle about until I find it—or find the site on which it stood. Whatever else, there is bound to be a source of water there."

"I can see sense in that," Count Brass agreed. "And if you grow weary, then one of us can relieve you, and so on. Are you certain that we are close to Soryandum?"

"I am. I shall look for the hills which mark the end of the desert. They should be near. If only these

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dunes were not so high, I am sure we should see the hills by now."

"Very well," said Count Brass. "We shall wait."

And Hawkmoon goaded his camel to its feet and rode away from where his friends still sat.

But it was not until the afternoon that he climbed the twentieth dune of the day and saw at last the green foothills of the mountains at the foot of which had lain Soryandum.

But he could not see the ruined city of the Wraith-folk. He had marked his way carefully on his map and now he retraced his journey.

He was almost back at the spot where he had left his friends when he saw the pyramid again. Foolishly he had decided to leave his encumbering flame-lances behind and he was not sure if any of the others knew how to work the lances, or whether they would care to, after what had happened to Oladahn.

He dismounted from the camel and proceeded as cautiously as he could, using the little cover available to him. Automatically he had drawn his sword.

Now words reached him from the pyramid. Kalan of Vitall was once again trying to convince his three friends that they should kill him when he returned.

"He is your enemy. Whatever else I might have told you, I spoke truth when I said that he will lead you to your deaths. You know Huillam D'Averc that you are a friend of Granbretan—Hawkmoon will turn you against the Dark Empire. And you, Bowgentle, you hate violence—Hawkmoon will make you a man of violence. And you, Count Brass, who have always been neutral where the affairs of Granbretan are concerned, he will set you upon a course which will make you fight against that very force which now you regard as a unifying factor in the future of Europe. And, as well as being deceived into acting against your better interests, you will be slain. Kill Hawkmoon now and . . ."

"Kill me, then!" Hawkmoon stood up, impatient with Kalan's cunning. "Kill me yourself, Kalan. Why can't you?"

The pyramid continued to hover over the heads of the three men as Hawkmoon looked down upon it from the dune.

"And why would killing me now make all that has gone before different, Kalan? Your logic is either very bad, or else you have not told us all that you should!"

"You grow boring, besides," said Huillam D'Averc. He drew his slim sword from its scabbard. "And I am very thirsty and tired, Baron Kalan. I think I will try my luck against you, for there's precious little else to do in this desert!"

And suddenly he had leaped forward, stabbing and stabbing again with his foil, the steel passing into the white material of the pyramid.

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Kalan screamed as if wounded. "Look to your own interest, D'Averc—it lies with me!"

D'Averc laughed and passed his sword again into the pyramid.

And again Kalan shouted. "I warn you, D'Averc—if you make me, I shall rid this world of you!"

"This world has nothing to offer. And it does not want me haunting it, either. I think I'll find your heart, Baron Kalan, if I continue to search."

He stabbed once more.

Kalan shouted once more.

Hawkmoon cried: "D'Averc, be careful!" He began to run and slide down the dune, trying to reach the flame-lance. But D'Averc had vanished, silently, before he had got halfway to the weapon.

"D'Averc!" Hawkmoon's voice had a baying quality, a mournful quality. "D'Averc!"

"Be silent, Hawkmoon," said Kalan's voice from the glowing pyramid. "Listen to me, you others. Kill him now—or D'Averc's fate shall be yours."

"It does not seem a particularly terrible fate." Count Brass smiled.

Hawkmoon picked up the flame-lance. Kalan could obviously see through the pyramid for he screamed. "Oh, you are crude, Hawkmoon. But you shall die yet."

And the pyramid faded and was gone.

Count Brass looked about him, a sardonic expression on his bronzed face. "Should we find Soryandum," he said, "it could come to pass that there'll be nothing of us to find in Soryandum. Our ranks are reducing swiftly, friend Hawkmoon."

Hawkmoon gave a deep sigh. "To lose good friends twice over is hard to bear. You cannot understand that. Oladahn and D'Averc were strangers to you as was I a stranger to them. But they were old, dear friends to me."

Bowgentle put a hand on Hawkmoon's shoulder. "I can understand," he said. "This business is harder on you than it is on us, Duke Dorian. For all that we are bewildered—tugged from our times, given omens of death on all sides, discovering peculiar machines which order us to kill strangers—you are sad. And grief could be called the most weakening of all the emotions. It robs you of will when you most need your will."

"Aye." Hawkmoon sighed again. He flung down the flame-lance. "Well," he said, "I have found Soryandum—or, at least, the hills in which Soryandum lies. We can get there by nightfall, I'd guess."

"Then let us hurry on to Soryandum," said Count Brass. He brushed sand from his face and his moustache. "With luck we shall not see Baron Kalan and his damned pyramid for a few days yet. And by that time we might have gone a stage or two further towards solving this mystery." He slapped Hawkmoon on the back. "Come, lad. Mount up. You never

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know—perhaps this will all end well. Perhaps you'll see your other friends again."

Hawkmoon smiled bitterly. "I have the feeling I'll be lucky if I ever see my wife and children again, Count Brass."

CHAPTER FOUR

A Further Encounter with Another Old Enemy

BUT THERE WAS no Soryandum in the green foothills bordering the Syranian desert. They found water. They found the outline which marked the area of the city, but the city had gone. Hawkmoon had seen it go, when threatened by the Dark Empire. Plainly the people of Soryandum had been wise, judging that the threat was not yet over. Wiser, Hawkmoon thought sardonically, than he. So, after all, their journey had been for nothing. There was only one other faint hope—that the cave of machines from which, years before, he had taken the crystal machines, was still intact. Miserably he led his two companions deep into the hills until Soryandum was several miles behind them.

"It seems that I have led you on a useless quest, my friends," Hawkmoon told Bowgentle and Count Brass. "And, moreover, offered you a false hope."

"Perhaps not," said Bowgentle thoughtfully. "It could be that the machines remain intact and that I, who have some slight experience of such things, might be able to see a use for them."

Count Brass was ahead of the other two, striding in his armour of brass, up the steep hill to stand on the brow and peer into the valley below.

"Is this your cave?" he called.

Hawkmoon and Bowgentle joined him. "Aye—that's the cliff," said Hawkmoon. A cliff which looked as if a giant sword had sheered a hill in two. And there, some distance to the south, he saw the cairn of granite, made from the stone sliced from the hill to make the cave in which the weapons were stored. And there was the cave opening, a narrow slit in the cliff face. It looked undisturbed. Hawkmoon's spirits began to rise a little.

He went faster down the hill. "Come, then," he called, "let's hope the treasures are intact!"

But there was something that Hawkmoon had forgotten in his confusion of thoughts and emotions. He had forgotten that the ancient technology of the Wraithfolk had had a guardian. A guardian that he and Oladahn had fought once before and had failed to destroy. A guardian that D'Averc had only just managed to escape from. A guardian that could not be reasoned with. And Hawkmoon wished that they had not left their camels resting at the site of Soryandum, for all he wished for now was a chance to

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flee swiftly.

"What is that sound?" asked Count Brass as a peculiar, muted wailing came from the crack in the cliff. "Do you recognise it, Hawkmoon?"

"Aye," said Hawkmoon miserably. "I recognise it. It is the cry of the machine-beast—the mechanical creature which guards the caves. I had assumed it destroyed but now it will destroy us, I fear.

"We have swords," said Count Brass.

Hawkmoon laughed wildly. "We have swords, aye!"

"And there are three of us," Bowgentle pointed out. "All cunning men."

"Aye."

The wailing increased as the beast scented them.

"We have only one advantage, however," said Hawkmoon softly. "The beast is blind. Our only chance is to scatter and run, making for Soryandum and our camels. There my flame-lance might prove effective for a short while."

"Run?" Count Brass looked disgruntled. He drew his great sword and stroked his red moustache. "I have never fought a mechanical beast before. I do not care to run, Hawkmoon."

"Then die—perhaps for the third time!" Hawkmoon shouted in frustration. "Listen to me Count Brass—you know I am not a coward—if we are to survive, we must get back to our camels before the beast catches us. Look!"

And the blind machine-beast emerged from the opening in the cliff, its huge head casting about for the source of the sounds and the scents it hated.

"Nion!" hissed Count Brass. "It is a large beast."

It was at least twice the size of Count Brass. Down the length of its back was a row of razor-sharp horns. Its metal scales were multicoloured and half-blinded them as it began to hop towards them. It had short hind-legs and long forelegs which ended in metal talons. Roughly of the proportions of a large gorilla, it had multifaceted eyes which had been broken in a previous fight with Hawkmoon and Oladahn. As it moved, it clashed. Its voice was metallic and made their teeth ache. Its smell, coming to them even from that distance, was also metallic.

Hawkmoon tugged at Count Brass's arm. "Please, Count Brass, I beg you. This is not the right ground on which to choose to make a stand."

This logic appealed to Count Brass. "Aye," he said, "I can see that. Very well, we'll make for the flat ground again. Will it follow us?"

"Oh, of that you can be certain!"

And then, in three slightly different directions, the companions began to run back towards the site of Soryandum as fast as they could before the beast decided which of

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them it would follow.

Their camels could smell the machine-beast, that was evident as they came panting back to where they had tethered their animals. The camels were tugging at the ropes which had been pegged to the ground. Their ugly heads reared, their mouths and nostrils twisted, their eyes rolled and their hooves thumped nervously at the barren ground.

Again the wailing shriek of the machine-beast echoed through the hills behind them.

Hawkmoon handed a flamelance to Count Brass. "I doubt if these will have much effect, but we must try them."

Count Brass grumbled. "I'd have preferred a hand to hand engagement with the thing."

"That could still happen," Hawkmoon told him with grim humour.

Hopping, waddling, running on all fours, the mighty metal beast emerged over the nearest hill, pausing as, again, it sought their scent—perhaps it even heard the sound of their heartbeats.

Bowgentle positioned himself behind his friends, for he had no flame-lance. "I am beginning to become tired of dying," he said with a smile. "Is that the fate of the dead, then? To die again and again through uncountable incarnations? It is not an appealing conception."

"Now!" Hawkmoon said, and pressed the stud of his flamelance. At the same time Count Brass activated his lance.

Ruby fire struck the mechanical beast and it snorted. Its scales glowed and in places became white hot, but the heat did not seem to have any effect upon the beast at all. It did not notice the flamelances. Shaking his head, Hawkmoon switched off his lance and Count Brass did the same. It would be stupid to use up the lances' power.

"There is only one way to deal with such a monster," said Count Brass.

"And what is that?"

"It would have to be lured into a pit . . ."

"But we do not have a pit," Bowgentle pointed out, nervously eying the creature as it began to hop nearer.

"Or a cliff," said Count Brass. "If it could be tricked to fall over a cliff . . ."

"There is no cliff nearby," Bowgentle said patiently.

"Then we shall perish, I suppose," said Count Brass with a shrug of his brazen shoulders. And then, before they could guess at what he planned, he had drawn his great broadsword and with a wild battle-yell was rushing upon the machine-beast—seemingly a man of metal attacking a monster of metal.

The monster roared. It stopped and it reared upon its hindquarters, its taloned paws slashing here and there at random, making the very air whistle.

Count Brass ducked beneath

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the claws and aimed a blow at the thing's midriff. His sword clanged on its scales and clanged again. Then Count Brass had jumped back, out of the reach of those slashing talons, bringing his sword down upon the great wrist as it passed him.

Hawkmoon joined him now, battering at one of the creature's legs with his own sword. And Bowgentle, able to forget his dislike of killing where this mechanical thing was concerned, tried to drive his blade up into the machine-beast's face, only to have the metal jaws close on the sword and snap it off cleanly.

"Get back, Bowgentle," Hawkmoon said. "You can do nothing now."

And the beast's head turned at the sound and the talons slashed again so that, in avoiding them, Hawkmoon stumbled and fell.

In again came Count Brass, roaring almost as loudly as his adversary. Again the blade clanged on the scales. And again the beast turned to seek the source of this new irritation.

But all three were tiring. Their journey across the desert had weakened them. Their run from the hills had tired them further. Hawkmoon knew that it was inevitable that they should perish here in the desert and that none should know the manner of their passing.

He saw Count Brass shout as he was flung backwards several feet by a sideswipe of the beast's paw. The Count, encumbered by his heavy armour, fell helplessly upon the barren ground, winded and, for the moment, unable to rise.

The metal beast sensed its opponent's weakness and lumbered forward to crush Count Brass beneath its huge feet.

Hawkmoon shouted wordlessly and ran at the thing, bringing his sword down upon its back. But it did not pause. Closer and closer it came to where Count Brass lay.

Hawkmoon darted around to put himself between the creature and his friend. He struck at its whirling talons, at its torso. His bones ached horribly as his sword shuddered with every blow he struck.

And still the beast refused to alter its course, its blind eyes staring ahead of it.

Then Hawkmoon, too, was flung aside and lay bruised and dazed, watching in horror as Count Brass struggled to rise. He saw one of the monstrous feet rise up above Count Brass's head, saw Count Brass raise an arm as if it would protect him from being crushed. Somehow he managed to get to his feet and began to stumble forward, knowing that he would be too late to save Count Brass, even if he could get to the machine-beast in time. And as he moved, so did Bowgentle—Bowgentle who had no weapon save the stump of a sword—rushing at the beast as if he thought he could turn it aside with his bare hands.

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And Hawkmoon thought: "I have brought my friends to yet another death. It is true what Kalan told them. I am their nemesis, it seems."

CHAPTER FIVE
Some Other Londra

AND THEN THE metal beast hesitated.

It whined almost plaintively.

Count Brass was not one to miss such an opportunity. Swiftly he rolled from under the great foot. He still did not have the strength to rise to his feet, but he began to crawl away, his sword still in his hand.

Both Bowgentle and Hawkmoon paused, wondering what had caused the beast to stop.

The machine-creature cringed. Its whine became placatory, fearful. It turned its head on one side as if it heard a voice which none of the others could hear.

Count Brass rose, at last, to his feet and wearily prepared himself again to fight the monster.

Then, with an enormous crash which made the earth shake, the beast fell and the bright colours of its scales became dull as if suddenly rusted. It did not move.

"What?" Count Brass's deep voice was puzzled. "Did we *will* it to death?"

Hawkmoon began to laugh as he noticed the faintest of outlines begin to appear against the clear, desert sky. "Someone might have done," he said.

Bowgentle gasped as he, too, noticed the outlines. "What is it? The ghost of a city?"

"Almost."

Count Brass growled. He sniffed and hefted his sword. "I like this new danger no better."

"It should not be a danger—to us," said Hawkmoon. "Soryandum is returning."

Slowly they saw the outlines grow firmer until soon a whole city lay spread across the desert. An ancient city. A ruined city.

Count Brass cursed and stroked his red moustache, his stance still that of one prepared for an attack.

"Sheath your sword, Count Brass," Hawkmoon said. "This is Soryandum that we sought. The Wraith-folk, those ancient immortals of whom I told you, have come to our rescue. This is lovely Soryandum. Look."

And Soryandum was lovely, for all that she lay in ruins. Her moss-grown walls, her fountains, her tall, broken towers, her blossoms of ochre, orange and purple, her cracked, marble pavements, her columns of granite and obsidian—all were beautiful. And there was an air of tranquility about the city, even about the birds which nested in her time-worn houses, the dust which blew through her deserted streets.

"This is Soryandum," said Hawkmoon again, almost in a whisper.

They stood in a square, beside the dead beast of metal.

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Count Brass was the first to move, crossing the weed-grown pavement and touching a column. "It is solid enough," he grunted. "How can this be?"

"I have ever rejected the more sensational claims of those who believe in the supernatural," said Bowgentle. "But now I begin to wonder . . ."

"This is science that has brought Soryandum here," Hawkmoon said. "And it is science that took her away. I know. I supplied the machine the Wraith-folk needed, for it is impossible for them to leave their city now. These folk were like us once, but over the centuries, according to a process I cannot begin to understand, they have rid themselves of physical form and have become creatures of mind alone. They can take physical shape when they desire it and they have greater strength than most mortals. They are a peaceful people—and as beautiful as this city of theirs."

"You are most flattering, old friend," said a voice from the air.

"Rinal?" said Hawkmoon, recognising the voice. "Is that you?"

"It is I. But who are your companions? Our instruments are confused by them. It is for this reason that we were reluctant to reveal either ourselves or our city, in case they should have deceived you in some way into leading them to Soryandum when they had evil designs against our city."

"They are good friends," said Hawkmoon, "but not of this time. Is that what confuses your instruments, Rinal?"

"It could be. Well, I shall trust you Hawkmoon, for I have reason to. You are a welcome guest in Soryandum, for it is thanks to you that we still survive."

"And it is thanks to you that I survive." Hawkmoon smiled. "Where are you Rinal?"

The figure of Rinal, tall, ethereal, appeared suddenly beside him. His body was naked and without ornament and it had a kind of milky opaque quality. His face was thin and his eyes seemed blind—as blind as those of the beast-machine—yet looked clearly at Hawkmoon.

"Ghosts of cities, ghosts of men," said Count Brass sheathing his sword. "Still, if you saved our lives from that thing," he pointed at the dead machine-beast, "I must thank you." He recovered his grace and bowed. "I thank you most humbly, Sir Ghost."

"I regret that our beast caused you so much trouble," said Rinal of Soryandum. "We created it to protect our treasures, many centuries ago. We would have destroyed it, save that we feared the Dark Empire folk would return to take our machines and put them to evil use—and also, we could do nothing until it came into the environs of our city, for, as you know, Dorian Hawkmoon, we have no power beyond Soryandum now. Our existence is completely linked with the existence

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of the city. It was an easy matter to tell the beast to die, however, once it was here."

"It was as well for us, Duke Dorian, that you advised us to flee back here," said Bowgentle feelingly. "Otherwise we should all three be dead by now."

"Where is your other friend," said Rinal. "The one who came with you first to Soryandum?"

"Oladahn is twice-dead," said Hawkmoon in a low voice.

"Twice?"

"Aye—just as these other friends of mine came close to dying for at least a second time."

"You intrigue me," said Rinal. "Come, we'll find you something with which to sustain yourselves as you explain all these mysteries to myself and the few others of my folk who remain."

Rinal led the three companions through the broken streets of Soryandum until they came to a three-storied house which had no entrance at ground level. Hawkmoon had visited the house before. Although superficially no different to the other ruins of Soryandum, this was where the wraith-folk lived when they needed to take material form.

And now two others emerged from above, drifting down towards Hawkmoon, Count Brass and Bowgentle and lifting them effortlessly, bearing them upward to the second level and a wide window which was the entrance to the house.

In a bare, clean room food was brought to them, though Rinal's folk had no need of food themselves. The food was delicious, though unfamiliar. Count Brass attacked it with vigour, speaking hardly at all as he listened to Hawkmoon tell Rinal of why they sought the assistance of the Wraith-folk of Soryandum.

And when Hawkmoon had finished his tale, Count Brass continued to eat, to Bowgentle's quiet amusement. Bowgentle himself was more interested in learning more about Soryandum and its inhabitants, its history and its science and Rinal told him much, between listening to Hawkmoon. He told Bowgentle how, during the Tragic Millenium, most of the great cities and nations had concentrated their energies on producing more and more powerful weapons of war. But Soryandum had been able to remain neutral, thanks to her remote geographical position. She had concentrated on understanding more of the nature of space, of matter and of time. Thus she had survived the Tragic Millenium and remembered all her knowledge while elsewhere knowledge died and superstition replaced it, as was ever the case in such situations.

"And that is why we now seek your help," said Hawkmoon. "We wish to find out how Baron Kalan escaped and to where he fled. We wish to discover how he manages to manipulate the stuff of time, to bring Count Brass and

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Bowgentle—and the others I mentioned—from one age to another and still not create a paradox in our minds at least."

"That sounds the simplest of the problems," said Rinal. "This Kalan seems to have got control of enormous power. Is he the one who destroyed your crystal machine—the one we gave you which allowed you to shift your own castle and city out of this space-time?"

"No, that was Taragorm I believe," Hawkmoon told Rinal. "But Kalan is just as clever as the old Master of the Palace of Time. However, I suspect that he is unsure of the nature of his power. He is reluctant to test it to its fullest extent. And, also, he seems to think that my death *now* might change *past* history. Is that possible?"

Rinal looked thoughtful. "It could be," he said. "This Baron Kalan must have a very subtle understanding of time. Objectively, of course, there is no such thing as past, present or future. Yet Baron Kalan's plot seems unnecessarily complicated. If he can manipulate time to that extent, could he not merely seek to destroy you *before*—subjectively speaking—you could be of service to the Runestaff?"

"That would change all the events concerning our defeat of the Dark Empire?"

"That is one of the paradoxes. Events are events. They occur. They are truth. But truth varies in different dimensions. It is just possible that there is some dimension of Earth so like your own that similar events are about to take place in it . . ." Rinal smiled. Count Brass's bronzed forehead had furrowed and he was plucking at his moustache and shaking his head from side to side as if he thought Rinal mad.

"You have another suggestion, Count Brass?"

"Politics are my interest," said Count Brass. "I've never cared overmuch for the more abstract areas of philosophy. My mind is not trained to follow your reasoning."

Hawkmoon laughed. "Mine, either. Only Bowgentle appears to know of what Rinal speaks."

"Something," Bowgentle admitted. "Something. You think that Kalan might be in some other dimension of the Earth where a Count Brass, say, exists who is not quite the same as the Count Brass who sits beside me now?"

"What?" Count Brass growled. "Have I a doppelganger?"

Hawkmoon laughed again. But Bowgentle's face was serious as he said: "Not quite, Count Brass. It occurs to me that, in this world, you would be the doppelganger—and I, for that matter. I believe that this is not our world—that the past we recall would not be quite the same, in detail, as that which friend Hawkmoon recalls. We are interlopers, through no fault of our own. Brought here to kill Duke

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Korian. Yet, save for reasons of perverse vengeance, why could not Baron Kalan kill Duke Dorian himself? Why must he use us?"

"Because of the repercussions—if your theory is correct—"put in Rinal. "His action must conflict with some other action which is against his interests. If he slays Hawkmoon, something will happen to him—a chain of events will come to pass which would be just that much different to the chain of events which will take place if one of you kills him."

"Yet he must have allowed for the possibility that we would not be deceived into killing Hawkmoon?"

"I think not," said Rinal. "I think things have gone awry for Baron Kalan. That is why he continued to try to force you to kill Hawkmoon even when it became obvious that you were suspicious of the situation. He must have based some plan on the expectation of Hawkmoon's being slain in the Kamarg. That is why he grows more and more hysterical. Doubtless he has other schemes afoot and sees them all endangered by Hawkmoon's continuing to live. That, too, is why he has only despatched those of you who have directly attacked him. He is somehow vulnerable. You would be well advised to discover the nature of that vulnerability."

Hawkmoon shrugged. "What chance have we of making such a discovery, when we do not even know where Baron Kalan is hiding?"

"It might be possible to find him," mused Rinal. "There are certain devices we invented when we were learning to shift our city through the dimensions—sensors and the like which can probe the various layers of the multiverse. We shall have to prepare them. We have used only one probe, to watch this area of our own Earth while we remained hidden in the other dimension. To activate the others will take a short while. Would this be helpful to you?"

"It would," said Hawkmoon.

"Does it mean we'll be given a chance to get our hands on Kalan?" growled Count Brass.

Bowgentle placed a hand on the shoulder of the man who would become, in later years, his closest friend. "You are impetuous, Count. Rinal's machines can only see into these dimensions. It will be another matter altogether, I am sure, to travel into them."

Rinal inclined his thin-skulled head. "That is true. However, let us see if we *can* find Baron Kalan of the Dark Empire. There is a good chance that we shall fail—for there are an infinity of dimensions, of this Earth alone."

Through most of the following day, while Rinal and his people worked on their machines, Hawkmoon, Bowgentle and Count Brass slept, recouping the strength they had expended in travelling to Soryandum and fighting the metal beast.

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And then, in the evening, Rinal floated through the window so that the rays of the setting sun seemed to radiate from his opaque body.

"They are ready, the devices," he said. "Will you come now? We are beginning to scan the dimensions."

Count Brass leapt up. "Aye, we'll come."

The others rose as two of Rinal's fellows entered the room and, in strong arms, lifted them up, through the window and to the floor above where were assembled an array of machines unlike any machines they had ever seen before. Like the crystal device which had shifted Castle Brass through the dimensions, these were more like jewels than machines—some of the jewels nearly the height of a man. At each of the machines floated one of the Wraith-folk, manipulating smaller jewels, not dissimilar to that small pyramid which Hawkmoon had seen in the hands of Baron Kalan.

A thousand pictures flashed upon the screens as the probes delved the dimensions of the multiverse, showing peculiar, alien scenes, many of which seemed to bear little relation to any Earth Hawkmoon knew.

And then, hours later, Hawkmoon cried: "There! A beast-mask! I saw it."

The operator stroked a series of crystals, trying to fix on the image which had flashed onto the screen so briefly. But it was gone.

Again the probes began their search. Twice more Hawkmoon thought he saw scenes providing evidence of Kalan's whereabouts, but twice more they lost the scene.

And then, at last, by the purest chance, they saw a white, glowing pyramid and it was unmistakeably the pyramid in which Baron Kalan travelled.

The sensors received a particularly strong signal, for the pyramid was in the process of completing a journey of its own, returning, Hawkmoon hoped, to its base.

"We can follow it easily enough. Watch."

Hawkmoon, Count Brass and Bowgentle gathered round the screen as it shadowed the milky pyramid until at last it came to a stop and began to turn transparent, revealing the hateful face of Baron Kalan of Vitall. Unaware that he was being observed by those he sought to destroy, he climbed from his pyramid into a large, dark, untidy room that might have been a copy of his old laboratory in Londra. He was frowning, consulting notes he had made. Another figure appeared and spoke to him, though the three friends heard no sound. The figure was clad in the old manner of the folk of the Dark Empire—a huge, cumbersome mask was on his head, completely covering it. The mask was of metal, enamelled in a score of colours, and had

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been fashioned to resembled the head of a hissing serpent.

Hawkmoon recognised it as the mask of the Order of the Snake—the order to which all sorcerers and scientists of old Granbretan had had to belong. Even as they watched, the snake-masked one handed another mask to Kalan who donned it hurriedly, for no Granbretanian of his kind could bear to be seen unmasked by any of his fellows.

Kalan's mask was also in the form of a serpent's head, but more ornate than his servant's.

Hawkmoon rubbed at his jaw, wondering why he felt something was wrong about the scene. He wished that D'Averc, more familiar with the intimate ways of the Dark Empire, was with him now, for D'Averc would have noticed.

And then it dawned on Hawkmoon that these masks were cruder than any he had seen in Londra, even those worn by the humblest servants. The finish of the masks, their design was not of the same quality. But why should this be?

Now the probes followed Kalan from his laboratory and through winding passages very like those which had once connected buildings in Londra. Superficially this place could have been Londra. But, again, these passages were subtly different. The stone was poorly faced, the carvings and murals were by inferior artists. None of this would have been tolerated in Londra where, for all their perverse tastes, the Lords of the Dark Empire had demanded the highest standards of craftsmanship, down to the smallest detail.

Here, detail was lacking. The whole thing resembled a bad copy of a painting.

The scene flickered as Kalan entered another chamber where more masked ones met. This chamber also looked familiar, but crude, like everything else.

Count Brass was fuming. "When can we get there? That's our enemy. Let's deal with him at once!"

"It is not easy to travel through the dimensions," Rinal said mildly. "Moreover, we have not yet traced exactly where it is that we are watching."

Hawkmoon smiled at Count Brass. "Have patience, sir."

This Count Brass was more impetuous than the man Hawkmoon had known. Doubtless it was because he was some twenty years younger. Or perhaps, as Rinal had suggested, he was not the same man—only a man very nearly the same, from another dimension. Still, Hawkmoon thought, he was satisfied with this Count Brass, wherever he came from.

"Our probe falters," said the wraith-man operating the screen. "The dimension we study must be many layers away."

Rinal nodded. "Aye, many. Somewhere even our old adventuring ancestors never explored. It will be hard to find a doorway

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through."

"Kalan found one," Hawkmoon pointed out.

Rinal smiled faintly. "By accident or by design, friend Hawkmoon?"

"By design, surely? Where else would he have discovered some other Londra?"

"New cities can be built," said Rinal.

"Aye," said Bowgentle. "And so can new realities."

CHAPTER SIX
Another Victim

THE THREE MEN waited anxiously while Rinal and his people considered the possibility of journeying into the dimension where Baron Kalan of Vitall was hiding.

"Since this new cult has grown up in the real Londra, I would assume that Kalan is visiting his supporters secretly. That explains the rumour that some of the Dark Empire Lords are still alive in Londra," Hawkmoon mused. "Our only other chance would be to go to Londra and seek Kalan out there, when he makes his next visit. But would we have the time?"

Count Brass shook his head. "That Kalan—he is desperate to accomplish his scheme. Why he should be so hysterical, with all the dimensions of space and time to play with, I cannot guess. Yet, though he can presumably manipulate us at will, he does not. I wonder why we should be so crucial to his plans?"

Hawkmoon shrugged. "Perhaps we are not. He would not be the first Dark Empire lord to let a thirst for vengeance get in the way of his own self-interest." He told them the story of Baron Meliadus.

Bowgentle had been pacing among the crystalline instruments, trying to understand the principles by which they worked, but they defeated him. Now they were all dormant as the Wraithfolk busied themselves in another part of the building with the problem of designing a machine which could shift through the dimensions. They would adapt the crystal engine which moved their city, but the actual engine they must retain, in case further danger threatened them.

"Well," said Bowgentle, scratching his head, "I can make nothing of the things. All I can say for certain is that they work!"

Count Brass stirred in his armour. He went to the window and looked out into cool night. "I'm becoming impatient with being cooped up here," he said. "I could do with some fresh air. What about you two?"

Hawkmoon shook his head. "I'll rest."

"I'll come with you," said Bowgentle to Count Brass. "But how do we leave?"

"Call Rinal," Hawkmoon said. "He'll hear you."

And this they did, looking

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slightly uncomfortable as the Wraith-folk, seemingly so frail, bore them through the window and down to the earth. Hawkmoon settled himself in a corner of the room and slept.

But strange, disquieting dreams, in which his friends changed into enemies and his enemies into friends, the living became the dead and the dead became the living, while some became the unborn, disturbed him and he forced himself awake, sweating, to find Rinal standing over him.

"The machine is ready," said the wraith-man. "But it is not perfect, I fear. All it can do is pursue your pyramid. Once the pyramid materialises in this world again, our sphere will follow it, wherever it goes—but it has no navigating power of its own—it can *only* follow the pyramid. Therefore there is a strong danger of your being trapped in some other dimension for all time."

"It is a risk I'm prepared to take, for one," Hawkmoon said. "It will be better than the nightmare I experience, awake or dreaming. Where are Count Brass and Bowgentle?"

"Somewhere nearby, walking and talking through the streets of Soryandum. Shall I tell them you wish to see them?"

"Aye," said Hawkmoon, rubbing sleep from his eyes. "We had best make our plans as soon as possible. I have a feeling we shall see Kalan again before long." He stretched and yawned. The sleep had not really helped him. Rather it appeared to have made him feel wearier than before.

He changed his mind. "No, perhaps I had better speak with them myself. The air might refresh me."

"As you will. I'll take you down." Rinal floated towards Hawkmoon.

As Rinal began to lift him towards the window, Hawkmoon asked: "Where is the machine you mentioned?"

"The dimension-travelling sphere? Below in our laboratory. Would you like to see it tonight?"

"I think I had better. I have a feeling Kalan could reappear at any time."

"Very well. I shall bring it to you shortly. The controls are simple—indeed they are scarcely controls at all since the purpose of the sphere is to make itself the slave of another machine. However, I understand your eagerness to see it. Go now and speak with your friends."

The wraith-man, virtually invisible in the moonlit street, drifted away, leaving Hawkmoon to find Bowgentle and Count Brass by himself.

He walked through overgrown streets, between ruined buildings through which the moonlight glared, enjoying the peace of the night and feeling his head begin to clear. The air was very sweet and cool.

At length he heard voices ahead

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of him and was about to call out when he realised that he heard the tones of three voices, not two. He began to run softly towards the source of the voices, keeping to the shadows, until he stood in the cover of a ruined colonnade and looked into a small square where stood Count Brass and Bowgentle. Count Brass stood frozen, as if mesmerised, and Bowgentle was remonstrating in a low voice with a man who sat cross-legged in the air above him, the outline of the pyramid glowing only very faintly, as if Kalan had deliberately tried to escape attention. Kalan was glaring at Bowgentle.

"What do you know of such matters?" Baron Kalan demanded. "Why—you are barely real yourself!"

"That's as may be. I suspect that your own reality is also at stake, is it not? Why can you not kill Hawkmoon yourself? Because of the repercussions, eh? Have you plotted the possibilities following such an action? Are they not very palatable?"

"Be silent, puppet!" Baron Kalan demanded. "Or you, too, will return to limbo. I offer you full life if you destroy Hawkmoon—or can convince Count Brass to do it!"

"Why did you not send Count Brass to limbo just now when he attacked you? Is it because you must have Hawkmoon killed by one of us and now there are only two left who can do your work?"

"I told you to be silent!" Kalan snarled. "You should have worked with the Dark Empire, Sir Bowgentle. Such wit as yours is wasted amongst the barbarians."

Bowgentle smiled. "Barbarians? I have heard something of what, in my future, the Dark Empire will do to its enemies. Your choice of words is poor, Baron Kalan."

"I warned you," Kalan said menacingly. "You go too far. I am still a Lord of Granbretan. I cannot tolerate such familiarity!"

"Your lack of tolerance has been your downfall once—or will be. We are beginning to understand what it is you try to do in your imitation Londra . . ."

"You know?" Kalan looked almost frightened. His lips pursed and his brows drew together. "You know, eh? I think we made a mistake in bringing a pawn of your perception onto the board, Sir Bowgentle."

"Aye, perhaps you did."

Kalan began to fiddle with the small pyramid he held in his hand. "Then it would be wise to sacrifice that pawn now," he muttered.

Bowgentle seemed to realise what was in Kalan's mind. He took a step backward. "Is that really wise? Are you not manipulating forces you barely understand?"

"Perhaps." Baron Kalan chuckled. "But that is no comfort to you, eh?"

Bowgentle grew pale.

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Hawkmoon made to move forward, wondering at the manner in which Count Brass still remained frozen, seemingly unaware of what was taking place. Then he felt a light touch on his shoulder and he started, turning and reaching for his sword. But it was the almost invisible wraith-man, Rinal, who stood behind him. Rinal whispered:

"The sphere comes. This is your chance to follow the pyramid."

"But Bowgentle is in danger . . ." Hawkmoon murmured. "I must try to save him."

"You will not be able to save him. It is unlikely that he will be harmed, that he will retain anything but the dimmest memory of these events—as you recall a fading dream."

"But he is my friend . . ."

"You will serve him better if you can find a way of stopping Kalan's activities for ever." Rinal pointed. Several of his folk were drifting down the street towards them. They were carrying a large sphere of glowing yellow. "There will be a few moments after the pyramid has gone when you'll be able to follow it."

"But Count Brass—he has been mesmerised by Kalan."

"The power will fade when Kalan leaves."

Bowgentle was speaking hurriedly. "Why should you fear my knowledge, Baron Kalan? You are strong. I am weak. It is you who manipulates me!"

"The more you know the less I can predict," said Kalan. "It is simple, Sir Bowgentle. Farewell."

And Bowgentle cried out, whirled as if trying to escape. He began to run and as he ran he faded, faded until he had disappeared altogether.

Hawkmoon heard Baron Kalan laugh. It was a familiar laugh. A laugh he had grown to hate. Only Rinal's hand on his shoulder stopped him from attacking Kalan who, still unaware that he was observed, addressed Count Brass:

"You will gain much, Count Brass, by serving my purpose—and gain nothing if you do not. Why should it be Hawkmoon who plagues me always? I had thought it a simple matter to eliminate him and yet in every probability I investigate he emerges again. He is eternal, I sometimes think—perhaps immortal. Only if he is slain by another hero, another champion of that damned Runestaff, can events progress along the course I choose. So slay him, Count Brass. Earn life for yourself and for me!"

Count Brass moved his head. He blinked. He looked around him as if he did not see the pyramid, or its occupant.

The pyramid began to glow with a milky whiteness. The whiteness became brilliant, blinding. Count Brass cursed and threw his arm up to protect his eyes.

And then the brilliance faded and there was only a dim outline

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against the night.

"Quickly," said Rinal. "Into the sphere."

As Hawkmoon passed through an entrance that was like a flimsy curtain which instantly reformed behind him, he saw Rinal drift over to Count Brass, seize him and bear him to the sphere, flinging him in after Hawkmoon so that he sprawled, sword still in hand, at Hawkmoon's feet.

"The saphire," Rinal said urgently. "Touch the saphire. It is all you must do. And I wish you success, Dorian Hawkmoon, in that other Londra!"

Hawkmoon reached out and touched the saphire stone suspended in the air before him.

At once the sphere seemed to spin around them, while he and Count Brass remained motionless. They were in complete blackness now and the white pyramid could be seen through the walls of the sphere.

Suddenly there was sunshine and a landscape of green rocks. This faded almost as quickly as it had appeared. More images followed rapidly.

Megaliths of light, lakes of boiling metal, cities of glass and steel, battlefields on which thousands fought, forests through which strode shadowy giants, frozen seas—and always the pyramid was ahead of them as it shifted through plane after plane of the Earth, through worlds which seemed totally alien and words which seemed absolutely identical to Hawkmoon's.

Once before had Hawkmoon travelled through the dimensions. But then he had been escaping from danger. Now he went towards it.

Count Brass spoke for the first time. "What happened back there? I remember trying to attack Baron Kalan, deciding that even if he sent me to limbo I should have his life first. Next I was in this—this chariot. Where is Bowgentle?"

"Bowgentle had begun to understand Kalan's plot," Hawkmoon said grimly, keeping his eyes fixed on the pyramid ahead. "And so Kalan banished him back to wherever it was he came from. But Kalan also gave something away. He said that, for some reason, I could only be slain by a friend—by some other who had served the Runestaff. And that, he said, would ensure the friend's life."

Count Brass shrugged. "It still has the smell of a perverse plot to me. Why should it matter who slays you?"

"Well, Count Brass," said Hawkmoon soberly. "I have often said that I would give anything for you not to have died on that battlefield at Londra. I would give my life, even. So, if the time ever comes when you wish to be done with all this—you can always kill me."

Count Brass laughed. "If you want to die, Dorian Hawkmoon, I am sure you can find one more

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used to cold-blooded assassination in Londra, or wherever it is we journey to now." He sheathed his great brass-hilted sword. "I'll save my own strength for dealing with Baron Kalan and his servants when we get there!"

"If they are not prepared for us," said Hawkmoon as wild scenes continued to come and go at even greater speed. He felt dizzy and he closed his eyes. "This journey through infinity appears to take an infinity! Once I cursed the Runestaff for meddling in my affairs, but now I wish greatly that Orland Fank was here to advise me. Still, it is plain by now that the Runestaff plays no part in this."

"Just as well," growled Count Brass. "There is already too much sorcery and science involved for my taste! I'll be happier when all this is finished, even should it mean by own death!"

Hawkmoon nodded his agreement. He was remembering Yisselda and his children, Manfred and Yarmila. He was remembering the quiet life of the Kamarg and the satisfactions he had got from seeing the marshlands restocked, the harvests brought in. And he was regretting bitterly that he had ever allowed himself to fall into the trap Baron Kalan had evidently set for him when he had sent Count Brass through time to haunt the Kamarg.

And at that, another thought occured to him. Had *all* this been a trap?

Did Baron Kalan actually *want* to be followed? Were they being lured, even now, to their doom?

Book Three
OLD DREAMS AND NEW

CHAPTER ONE
The World Half-made

COUNT BRASS, LYING uncomfortably along the curve of the sphere's interior, groaned and shifted his brass-clad bulk again. He peered through the misty yellow wall and watched the landscape outside change forty times in as many seconds. The pyramid was still ahead of them. Sometimes the outline of Baron Kalan could be seen within. Sometimes the vessel's surface turned to that familiar, blinding white.

"Ah, my eyes ache!" grumbled Count Brass. "They grow weary of so many variegated sights. And my head aches when I strive to consider exactly what is happening to us. If I should ever tell of this adventure I shall never have my word believed again!"

And then Hawkmoon cautioned him to silence, for the scenes came and went much more slowly until at last they ceased to change. They hung in darkness. All they could see beyond the sphere was the white pyramid.

Light came from somewhere.

Hawkmoon recognised Baron Kalan's laboratory. He acted swift-

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ly, instinctively. "Quickly, Count Brass, we must leave the sphere."

They dived through the curtain and onto the dirty flagstones of the floor. By chance they were behind several large and crazily shaped machines at the back of the laboratory.

Hawkmoon saw the sphere shudder and vanish. Now only Kalan's pyramid offered an escape from this dimension. Familiar smells and sounds came to Hawkmoon. He remembered when he had first visited Kalan's laboratories, as a prisoner of Baron Meliadus, to have the Black Jewel implanted in his skull. He felt a strange coldness in his bones. Their arrival had been unnoticed it seemed, for Kalan's serpent-masked servants had their attention on the pyramid, standing ready to hand their master his own mask when he emerged. The pyramid sank slowly to the ground and Kalan stepped out of it, accepting the mask without a word and donning it. There was something hasty about his movements. He said something to his servants and they all followed him as he left the laboratory.

Cautiously Hawkmoon and Count Brass emerged. Both had unsheathed their swords.

Assured that the laboratory was, indeed, completely deserted, they debated their next action.

"Perhaps we should wait until Kalan returns and slay him on the spot," Count Brass suggested, "using his own machine for our escape."

"We do not know how to operate the machine," Hawkmoon reminded his friend. "No, I think we should learn more of this world and Kalan's plans before we consider killing him. For all we know he has other allies, more powerful than himself, who would continue to put his schemes into effect."

"That's fair enough," Count Brass agreed. "But this place makes me nervous. I've never been one to enjoy being underground. I prefer the open spaces. That's why I could never remain in one city for long."

Hawkmoon began to inspect Baron Kalan's machines. Many of them were familiar to him in appearance, but he could make out little of their functions. He wondered if he should destroy the machines first, but then he decided it would be wiser to learn for what purpose they were intended. They could produce a disaster by tampering with the kind of forces with which Kalan was experimenting.

"With the right masks and clothes," Hawkmoon said, as they both padded towards the door, "we would have an improved chance of exploring this place undiscovered. I think we should make that objective our first priority."

Count Brass agreed.

They opened the door of the laboratory and found themselves in a low-ceilinged passage. The

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smell was musty, the air stale. Once the whole of Londra had reeked of the same stink. But, now that he was able to inspect the murals and carvings on the walls more closely, Hawkmoon was certain this was not Londra. The absence of detail was most noticeable. Paintings were done in outline and then filled in with solid colours, not the subtle shades of the clever Granbretanian artists. And whereas colours had been clashed in old Londra with the intention of making an effect, these colours were merely poorly selected. It was as if someone who had only see Londra for half-an-hour or so had tried to recreate it.

Even Count Brass, who had only visited Granbretan once, on some diplomatic errand, noticed the contrast. On they crept, without encountering anyone, trying to determine which way Baron Kalan had gone, when all at once they had turned a corner in the passage and come face to face with two soldiers of the Mantis Order—King Huron's old Order—armed with long pikes and swords.

Immediately, Count Brass and Hawkmoon took up a fighting stance, expecting the two soldiers to attack. The mantis masks nodded on the men's shoulders, but they only stared at Count Brass and his companion, as if puzzled.

One of the soldiers spoke in a vague, muffled voice from within his mantis-helm. "Why do you go unmasked?" he said. "Should this be?"

His voice had a distant, dream-like quality, not unlike that of Count Brass when Hawkmoon had first encountered him in the Kamarg.

"Aye. It is correct," said Hawkmoon. "You are to give us your masks."

"But unmasking is forbidden in the passages!" said the second soldier in horror. His gauntletted hands went to his great insect helm as if to protect it. Mantis eyes seemed to stare sardonically into Hawkmoon's.

"Then we must fight you for them," growled Count Brass. "Draw your sword."

Slowly the two drew their swords. Slowly they assumed defensive positions.

It was horrible work, killing those two, for they did not make any more than a token effort to defend themselves. They went down in the space of half-a-minute and Hawkmoon and Count Brass began immediately to strip them of their masks and their outer clothes of green silk and green velvet.

They stripped the pair just in time. Hawkmoon was wondering what to do with the bodies when, suddenly, they vanished.

Count Brass snorted suspiciously. "More sorcery?"

"Or an explanation for why they behaved so strangely," said Hawkmoon thoughtfully. "They vanished as Bowgentle, Oladahn

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and D'Averc vanished. The Mantis Order was ever the fiercest in Granbretan and those who belonged to it were arrogant, proud and quick to strike. Either those fellows were not really of Granbretan, but playing parts for Baron Kalan's benefit—or else they *were* from Granbretan, but in some kind of trance."

"They seemed to be in a dream, right enough," agreed Count Brass.

Hawkmoon adjusted his stolen mask upon his head. "Best behave the same, if challenged," he said. "That, too, will be to our advantage."

Together they continued to make their way through the passages, moving at a measured pace, like that of patrolling soldiers.

"At least," said Count Brass in a low voice, "we shall have little trouble with corpses if all those we slay disappear with such fortunate alacrity!"

They paused at several doors and tried them, but all were secured. They passed many other masked men, from all the main orders—Pig, Vulture, Dragon, Wolf and the like—but saw no other members of the Order of the Snake. Members of this order, they were sure, would lead them eventually to Kalan. It would also be useful to exchange mantis masks for serpent masks at some stage. Finally they found themselves at a door larger than the others and this was guarded by two men who wore the same masks now worn by Hawkmoon and Count Brass. A guarded door was an important door, thought Hawkmoon. Behind it might lie something which would help answer the questions he had followed Kalan to solve. He thought quickly, saying in as dreamy a voice as he could manage:

"We have orders to relieve you. You may return to your quarters now."

One of the guards spoke. "Relieve us? Have we been here for a full period of duty, then? I thought it was but an hour. But then time . . ." He paused. "It is all so strange."

"You are relieved," said Count Brass, guessing Hawkmoon's plan. "That is all we know."

Sluggishly the two guards saluted and marched away, leaving Hawkmoon and Count Brass to take up their positions.

As soon as the guards were gone, Hawkmoon turned and tried the latch of the door. It was locked.

Count Brass glanced around him, shuddering. "This seems more of a true netherworld than the one I first found myself in," he said.

"I think you could be close to the truth," Hawkmoon told him as he bent to inspect the lock. Like so many of the other artefacts here it was crude. He took out the emerald-pommelled poignard which he had got off the mantis-warrior. He inserted the point in the lock and shifted it about for

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several seconds before twisting it sharply. There was a click and the door swung open.

The two companions stepped through.

And both gasped in unison at what they saw.

CHAPTER TWO
A Museum of the Living and the Dead

"KING HUON!" HAWKMOON murmured. Quickly he closed the door behind him, looking up at the great globe suspended above his head. In the globe swam the wizened figure of the ancient king who had once spoken with the voice of a golden youth. "I thought you slain by Meliadus!"

A tiny whisper escaped the globe. It was almost a thought, so tenuous was it. "Meliadus," it said. "Meliadus."

"The king dreams," said the voice of Flana, Queen of Granbretan.

And there she was, in her heron mask, made up of fragments of a thousand jewels, in her lush brocade gown, coming slowly towards them.

"Flana?"

Hawkmoon moved towards her. "How did you come to be here?"

"I was born in Londra. Who are you? Though you be of the King-Emperor's own Order, you speak insolently to Flana, Countess of Kanbery."

"Queen Flana now," said Hawkmoon.

"Queen . . . queen . . . queen . said the distant voice of King Huon from behind them.

"King . . ." Another figure moved blindly past them. "King Meliadus . . ."

And Hawkmoon knew that if he tore off that wolf helm from the figure he would see the face of Baron Meliadus, his old foe. And he knew that the eyes would be glazed, as Flana's eyes would be glazed. There were others in this room—all Dark Empire folk. Flana's old husband, Asrovak Mikosevaar; Shenegar Trott in his silver mask; Pra Flenn, Duke of Lakasdeh, in his grinning dragon helm, who had died before his nineteenth birthday and had personally slain over a hundred men and women before his eighteenth. Yet, for all that this was an assembly of the fiercest of the Granbretanian warlords, none attacked. They hardly lived at all. Only Flana—who still lived in Hawkmoon's world—seemed to be able to frame a coherent sentence. The rest were like sleepwalkers, mumbling one or two words, but no more. And Hawkmoon's and Count Brass's entrance into this weird museum of the living and the dead had set them to babbling, like birds in an aviary.

It was unnerving, particularly to Dorian Hawkmoon, who had slain many of these people himself. He seized upon Flana, ripping off his own mask so that she could see

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his face.

"Flana! Do you not recognise me? Hawkmoon? How came you here?"

"Remove your hand from me, warrior!" she said automatically, though it was plain she did not really care. Flana had never understood much concerning protocol. "I do not know you. Put your mask back on!"

"Then you, too, must have been drawn from a time before we met—or else from some other world altogether," Hawkmoon said.

"Meliadus . . . Meliadus . . ." said the whispering voice of King Huon in the Throne Globe above their heads.

"King . . . king . . ." said wolf-masked Meliadus.

And: "The Runestaff . . ." murmured fat Shenegar Trott, who had died trying to possess that mystic wand . . . "The Runestaff . . ."

It was all they could speak of—their fears or their ambitions. The chief fears or ambitions which had driven them through their lives and brought about their ruin.

"You are right," said Hawkmoon to Count Brass. "This is the world of the dead. But who keeps these poor creatures here? For what purpose have they been resurrected? It is like an obscene treasure-house—human loot—the loot of time—all crowded together!"

"Aye," sniffed Count Brass. "I wonder if, until recently, I was part of this collection. Could that not be possible, Dorian Hawkmoon?"

"These are all Dark Empire folk," said Hawkmoon. "No, I think you were seized from a time before all these died. Your youth speaks for that—and your own recollection of the Battle of Tarkia."

"I thank you for that reassurance," said Count Brass.

Hawkmoon put a finger to his lips. "Do you hear something? In the passage?"

"Aye."

"Into the shadows," said Hawkmoon. "I think someone approaches. They might notice the guard gone."

Not one of the people in the room, even Flana, tried to stop them as they squeezed through the company and hid in the darkest corner, sheltered by the bulk of Adaz Promp and Jherek Nankenseen, who had ever enjoyed each other's company, even in life.

The door opened and there was Baron Kalan of Vitall, Grand Master of the Order of the Serpent, all rage and bewilderment.

"The door open and the guards gone!" he raved. He glared at the company of living-dead. "Which of you did this? Is there one who does more than dream—who plots to rob me of my power? Who seeks that power for himself? You, Meliadus—do you wake?" He pulled the wolf-helm free, but Meliadus's face was blank.

Kalan slapped the face, but Meliadus did not react. He

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grunted.

"You Huon? Even you are no longer as powerful as am I? Do you resent that?"

But Huon merely whispered the name of the one who would kill him. "Meliadus . . ." he whispered. "Meliadus . . ."

"Shenegar Trott? You, cunning one?" Kalan shook the unresponsive shoulder of the Count of Sussex. "Did you unlock the door and dismiss the guards. And why?" He frowned. "No, it could only be Flana . . ." He searched for the heron mask of Flana Mikosevaar, Countess of Kanbery, among those many masks (whose workmanship was noticeably superior to Kalan's). "Flana is the only one who suspects . . ."

"What do you want with me now, Baron Kalan?" said Flana, drifting forward. "I am tired. You must not disturb me."

"You cannot deceive me, traitress-to-be. If I have an enemy here, it is you. Who else could it be? It is in everyone's interest, save yours, for the old Empire to be restored."

"As usual, I fail to understand you, Kalan."

"Aye, it's true that you *should* not understand—but I wonder . . ."

"Your guards came in here," Flana went on. "They were impolite fellows, but one was handsome enough."

"Handsome? They removed their masks?"

"One did, aye."

Kalan's eyes darted this way and that as he considered the implications of her remark. "How. . . ?" he muttered. "How. . . ?" He looked hard at Flana. "I still think this is your doing!"

"I do not know of what you accuse me, Kalan, and I do not care, for this nightmare will end soon, as nightmares must."

Kalan's eyes glinted sardonically in his snake mask. "Think you, madam?" He turned away to inspect the lock. "My plans go constantly awry. Every action I make leads to further complications. There must be a single action which will wipe out the complexities at a stroke. Oh, Hawkmoon, Hawkmoon, I wish you would die."

At this Hawkmoon stepped out swiftly and tapped Kalan upon the shoulder with the flat of his sword. Kalan turned and the tip of the sword slipped under the mask and rested against the throat.

"If the request had been couched more politely, in the first place," Hawkmoon said with grim humour, "I might have complied. But now you have offended me, Baron Kalan. Too often have you shown yourself unfriendly to me."

"Hawkmoon . . ." Kalan's voice sounded like those of the living dead around him. "Hawkmoon . . ." He took a deep breath. "How did you come here?"

"Don't you know, Kalan?"

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Count Brass emerged, drawing off his own mask. He was grinning a big, wide grin—the first Hawkmoon had seen on his face since they had met in the Kamarg.

"Is this a counterplot—did *he* bring you—? No . . . He would not betray me. We have too much at stake."

"Who is that?"

But Kalan had become cautious. "Killing me at this point could easily bring disaster upon us all," he said.

"Aye—and not killing you, that could produce a similar effect!" Count Brass laughed. "Have we anything to lose, Baron Kalan?"

"You have your life to lose, Count Brass," Kalan said savagely. "At best you could become like these others. Is that an attractive thought?"

"No." Count Brass began to strip off the mantis-clothing which had covered his brass armour.

"Then do not be a fool!" Kalan hissed. "Kill Hawkmoon now!"

"What did you try to do, Kalan?" Hawkmoon interrupted. "Resurrect the whole Dark Empire? Did you hope to restore it here to its former glory—in a world where Count Brass and myself and the others never existed? But you found that when you went back into the past and brought them here to rebuild Londra, that their memories were poor. It was as if they all dreamed. They had too many conflicting experiences in their minds and this confused them—made their brains dormant. They could not remember details—that is why all your murals and your artefacts are so crude, is it not? Why your guards are so ineffectual, why they do not fight. And when they are killed here, they vanish—for even you cannot control time to the extent that it tolerates the paradox of the twice-dead. You began to realise that if you altered history—even if you were successful in re-establishing the Dark Empire—all would suffer from this mental confusion. Everything would break down as swiftly as you built it. Any triumph you had would turn to ashes. You would rule over unreal creatures in an unreal world."

Kalan shrugged. "But we have taken steps to adjust matters. There are solutions, Hawkmoon. Perhaps our ambitions have become a little less grandiose, but the result could be much the same."

"What do you intend to do?" Count Brass growled.

Kalan gave a humourless laugh. "Ah, that now depends on what you do to me. Surely you can see that? Already there are eddies of confusion in the time-streams. One dimension becomes clogged with the constituents of another. Originally my scheme was simply to get vengeance on Hawkmoon by having him killed by one of his friends. I'll admit I was foolish to think it could be so simple. And also, instead of remaining in your dreamlike state, you began to

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wake, to reason, to refuse to listen to what I told you. That is not what should have happened and I do not know why."

"By bringing my friends out of a time before any of us had met, you created an entirely new stream of possibilities," said Hawkmoon. "And from these sprang dozens more—half-worlds which you can't control, which become confused with the one from which we all originally came . . ."

"Aye." Kalan nodded his great mask. "But there is still hope, if you, Count Brass, slay this Hawkmoon. Surely you realise that your friendship with him led directly to your own death—or will lead to it in your future . . ."

"So Oladahn and the others were merely returned to their own time, believing themselves to have dreamed what happened here?" said Hawkmoon.

"Even that dream will fade," said Kalan. "They will never know that I tried to help them save their own lives."

"And why do you not kill me, Kalan? You have had the opportunity. Is it, as I suspect, that if you do, then the logic resulting from such an action leads inexorably to your own destruction?"

Kalan was silent. But his silence confirmed the truth of what Hawkmoon had said.

"And only if I am killed by one of my already dead friends will it be possible to remove my unwanted presence from all those possible worlds you have explored, those half-worlds your instruments have detected, where you hope to restore the Dark Empire? Is that why you are so insistent on Count Brass killing me? And do you intend, once he has done that, to restore the Dark Empire, unchallenged, to its original world—with yourselves ruling behind these puppets of yours?" Hawkmoon spread his hand to indicate the living-dead. Even Queen Flana was quiescent now as her brain shut off the information which might easily turn it insane. "These shadows will appear to be the great warlords come back from the dead, to hold sway over Granbretan again. You will even have a new Queen Flana to renounce the throne in favour of this Shadow Huon."

"You are an intelligent young man, for a savage." A languid voice came from the doorway. Hawkmoon kept the tip of his sword against Kalan's throat as he looked towards the source of the voice.

A bizarre figure stood there, between two mantis-masked guards who bore flame-lances and looked anything but indecisive. There were, it now seemed, others in this world who were more than shadows. Hawkmoon recognised the figure, clad in a gigantic mask which was also a working clock and was, even as its wearer spoke, chiming the first eight bars of Sheneven's *Temporal Antipathies*, all of gilded and

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enamelled brass, with numerals of inlaid mother-of-pearl and hands of filligree silver, balanced by a golden pendulum in a box worn upon his chest.

"I thought you might be here, too, My Lord Taragorm," said Hawkmoon. He lowered his sword as the flame-lances nudged his midriff.

Taragorm of the Palace of Time voiced his golden laughter.

"Greetings, Duke Dorian. You will note, I hope, that these two guards are not of the company of the Dreaming Ones. These escaped with me at the Siege of Londra, when it became obvious to Kalan and myself that the battle was lost to us. Even then we could probe a little way into the future. My sad accident was arranged—an explosion produced to cause my apparent death. And Kalan's suicide, as you already know, was in reality the occasion of his first jump through the dimensions. We have worked so well together, since then. But there have been a few complications, as you've guessed."

Kalan moved forward and took the swords of Count Brass and Hawkmoon. Count Brass was scowling but seemed too astonished to resist at that moment. He had never seen Taragorm, Master of the Palace of Time, before.

Taragorm continued, his voice full of amusement. "Now that you have been gracious enough to visit us, I hope those complications can be dispensed with, at long last. I had not hoped for such a stroke of luck! You were ever headstrong, Hawkmoon."

"And how will you achieve it—freeing yourselves of the complications you have created?" Hawkmoon folded his arms on his chest.

The clock face inclined itself slightly to one side, the pendulum beneath continued to swing, balanced as it was by complicated machinery, allowing for every movement of Taragorm's body.

"You will know when we return to Londra shortly. I speak, of course, of the true Londra, where we are soon expected, not this poor imitation. Kalan's idea, not mine."

"You supported me!" said Kalan in an aggrieved tone. "And it is I who take all the risks, travelling back and forth through a thousand dimensions . . ."

"Let us not have our guests think us petty, Baron Kalan," Taragorm chided. There had always been something of a rivalry between the two of them. He bowed slightly to Count Brass and Hawkmoon. "Please come with us while we make the final preparations for our journey back to our old home."

Hawkmoon stood his ground. "If we refuse?"

"You will be stranded here forever. You know we cannot, ourselves, kill you. You bank on that, do you? Well, alive in this place or dead in another, it's all

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much of a muchness, friend Hawkmoon. And now, please cover up your naked face. I know it might seem rude, but I am dreadfully old-fashioned about such things."

"I regret that, in this too, I must give offence," said Hawkmoon with a small bow. He let the guards lead him through the door. He saluted the dull-eyed Flana and the others, who had even stopped breathing, it seemed. "Farewell, sad shades. I hope I shall, at length, be the cause of your release."

"I hope so, also," said Taragorm. And the hands on the face of his mask moved a fraction and his bell began to strike the hour.

CHAPTER THREE
Count Brass Chooses to Live

THEY WERE BACK in Baron Kalan's laboratory.

Hawkmoon considered the two guards who now had their swords. He could tell that Count Brass was also wondering whether it would be possible to rush the flame-lances.

Kalan was already in the white pyramid, making adjustments to the smaller pyramids which were suspended before him. Because he was still wearing his serpent mask, he had greater difficulty in manipulating the objects and arranging them to his satisfaction. It seemed to Hawkmoon, as he watched, that somehow this scene symbolised a salient aspect of the Dark Empire culture.

For some reason Hawkmoon felt singularly calm as he considered his situation. Instinct told him to bide his time, that the crucial moment of action would come quite soon. And for this reason he relaxed his body and took no notice of the guards with their flame-lances, concentrating on what Kalan and Taragorm were saying.

"The pyramid is almost ready," Kalan told Taragorm. "But we must leave swiftly."

"Are we all to crowd into that thing?" Count Brass said, and he laughed. Hawkmoon realized that Count Brass, too, was biding his time.

"Aye," said Taragorm. "All."

And, as they watched, the pyramid began to expand until it was twice its size, then three times, then four and at last it filled the entire cleared space in the centre of the laboratory and suddenly Count Brass, Hawkmoon, Taragorm and the two mantis-masked guards were engulfed by the pyramid and stood within it while Kalan, suspended above their heads, continued to play with his odd controls.

"You see," said Taragorm. His voice was amused. "Kalan's talents always lay in his understanding of the nature of space. Whereas mine, of course, lie in my understanding of time. That is why together we can produce such

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whimsicalities as this pyramid!"

And now the pyramid was travelling again, shunting through the myriad dimensions of Earth. Once more Hawkmoon saw bizarre scenery and peculiar mirror-images of his own world and many of them were not the same as those he had witnessed on his journey to Kalan's and Taragorm's half-world.

And then it seemed they were in the darkness of limbo again. Beyond the flickering walls of the pyramid Hawkmoon could see nothing but solid blackness.

"We are there," said Kalan, and he turned a crystal control. The vessel began to shrink again, growing smaller and smaller until it could barely contain Kalan's body. The sides of the pyramid clouded and turned to the familiar brilliant white. Hanging in the blackness over their heads it seemed to provide no illumination beyond its immediate area. Hawkmoon could see nothing of his own body, let alone those of the others. He knew only that his feet stood upon smooth and solid ground and that his nostrils picked up a damp, stale smell. He stamped his foot upon the ground and the sound echoed and echoed. It seemed that they were in a cavern of some kind.

Now Kalan's voice boomed from the pyramid.

"The moment has come. The resurrection of our great Empire is at hand. We, who can bring life to the dead and death to the living, who have remained faithful to the old ways of Granbretan, who are pledged to restore her greatness and her domination over the whole world, bring the faithful ones the creature they most desire to see. Behold!"

And suddenly Hawkmoon was engulfed in light. The source was a mystery, but the light blinded him and made him cover his eyes. He cursed as he turned this way and that, trying to avoid it.

"See how he wriggles," said Kalan of Vitall. "See how he cringes, this, our arch-enemy!"

Hawkmoon forced himself to stand still and open his eyes to the terrible light.

A dreadful whispering was coming from all around him now, and a slithering, and a hissing. He peered about him, but could still see nothing beyond the light. The whispering grew to a murmur and the murmur to a muttering and the muttering to a roar and the roar became a single word, voiced by what must have been a thousand throats.

"Granbretan! Granbretan! Granbretan!"

And then there was silence.

"Enough of this!" came the voice of Count Brass. "Have done with—aaah!"

And now Count Brass, too, was surrounded with the same strange radiance.

"And here is the other," said Kalan's voice. "Faithful, look upon him and hate him, for this is Count Brass. Without his help,

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Hawkmoon would never have been able to destroy that which we love. By treachery, by stealth, by cowardice, by begging the assistance of those more powerful than themselves, they thought they could destroy the Dark Empire. But the Dark Empire is not destroyed. She will grow stronger and greater still! Behold, Count Brass!"

And Hawkmoon saw the white light surrounding Count Brass grow a peculiar blue colour and Count Brass's armour of brass glowed blue, too, and Count Brass clapped his gauntletted hands to his helmeted head and he opened his mouth and let out a scream of pain.

"Stop!" cried Hawkmoon. "Why torture him?"

Lord Taragorm's voice came from nearby, soft and pleased. "Surely you know why, Hawkmoon?"

And now brands flared and Hawkmoon saw that, indeed, they stood in a great cavern. And the five of them—Count Brass, Lord Taragorm, the two guards and himself—stood upon the top of a ziggurat raised in the centre of the cavern, while Baron Kalan in his pyramid hovered above their heads.

And below there were at least a thousand masked figures, travesties of beasts, with heads of Pig and Wolf and Bear and Vulture, swarming below and screaming out now as Count Brass screamed and fell to his knees, still surrounded by the awful blue flame.

And the leaping light of the brands showed murals and carvings and bas-reliefs which were, in the details of their obscenity, evidently of true Dark Empire workmanship. And Hawkmoon knew that they must be in Londra proper, probably in some cavern beneath a cavern, far below the foundations of the city.

He tried to reach Count Brass, but the light around his own body stopped him.

"Torture me!" cried Hawkmoon. "Leave Count Brass and torture me!"

And again came Taragorm's soft, sardonic voice. "But we *do* torture you, Hawkmoon, do we not?"

"Here is the one who brought us to the edge of annihilation!" came Kalan's voice from above. "Here is the one who, in his pride, thought he had destroyed us. But we shall destroy him. And with his destruction will come an end to all restraint upon us. We shall emerge, we shall conquer. The dead shall return and lead us—King Huon . . ."

"King Huon!" roared the masked crowd.

"Baron Meliadus!" cried Kalan.

"Baron Meliadus!" roared the crowd.

"Shenegar Trott, Count of Sussex!"

"Shenegar Trott!"

"And all the great heroes and demigods of Granbretan shall return!"

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"All! All!"

"Aye—all shall return. And they shall have vengeance upon this world!"

"Vengeance!"

"The Beasts shall have vengeance!"

And again, quite suddenly, the crowd fell silent.

And again Count Brass screamed and tried to rise on his knees and beat at his body as the blue flame brought pain.

Hawkmoon saw that Count Brass was sweating, that his eyes burned as if with fever, that his lips writhed.

"Stop!" he cried. He tried to break through the light which held him, but again without success. "Stop!"

But now the beasts were laughing. Pigs giggled, dogs cackled, wolves barked and insects hissed. They laughed to see Count Brass in such pain and his friend in such helpless misery.

And Hawkmoon realised they were trapped in a ritual—a ritual which had been promised these mask-wearers in return for their loyalty to the unregenerate lords of the Dark Empire.

And what would the ritual lead to?

He began to guess.

Count Brass rolled upon the floor now, nearly falling over the edge of the ziggurat. And, every time he came close to the edge, something rolled him back to the centre. The blue flame ate at his nerves and his screams came louder and louder. He had lost all dignity, all identity, in that pain.

Hawkmoon wept as he begged Kalan and Taragorm to desist.

At last it stopped. Count Brass got shakily to his feet. The blue light faded to white and then the white light faded, too. Count Brass's face was taut. His lips were all bloody. His eyes had horror in them.

"Would you kill yourself, Hawkmoon, to end your friend's agony?" Taragorm's taunting voice came from beside the Duke of Köln. "Would you do that?"

"So that is the alternative. Did your prognosis show you that your cause would triumph if I slew myself?"

"It improves our chances. It would be best if Count Brass could be prevailed upon to kill you but, if he will not . . ." Taragorm shrugged. "This is the next best thing."

Hawkmoon looked towards Count Brass. For an instant their eyes met and he stared into yellow orbs that were full of agony. Hawkmoon nodded. "I will do it. But first you must release Count Brass."

"Your own death will release Count Brass," said Kalan from above. "Be sure of that."

"I do not trust you," Hawkmoon said.

The beasts below watched on with bated breath as they waited for their enemy to die.

"Will this be sufficient evidence of our faith?" The white light

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faded from around Hawkmoon, too. Taragorm took Hawkmoon's sword from the soldier who still held it. He handed it to Hawkmoon. "There. Now you can kill me or kill yourself. Only be assured that if you kill me, Count Brass's torture will continue. If you kill yourself, it will cease."

Hawkmoon licked his dry lips. He looked from Count Brass to Taragorm to Kalan and to the blood-hungry crowd. To kill himself for the pleasure of these degenerates was loathsome. And yet, it was the only way to save Count Brass. But what of the rest of the world? He was too dazed to think of anything more, to consider any further possibilities.

Slowly he shifted his sword in his hand until the pommel was upon the flagstones and the tip under his breastplate, resting against his flesh.

"You will still perish," Hawkmoon said. His smile was bitter as he contemplated the frightful crowd. "Whether I live or die. You will perish because of the rot that is in your souls. You perished before because you turned inward upon each other as a response to the great danger which threatened you. You squabbled, beast against beast, as we attacked Londra. Could we have succeeded without your help? I think not."

"Be silent!" Kalan cried from his pyramid. "Do what you have agreed to do, Hawkmoon, or Count Brass begins to dance again!"

But then Count Brass's voice, deep and huge and weary, came from behind Hawkmoon.

Count Brass said:

"No!"

"If Hawkmoon goes back on his word, Count Brass, then back comes flame and pain . . ." said Taragorm, as one might address a child.

"No," said Count Brass. "I'll suffer no more."

"You wish to kill yourself, too?"

"My life means very little at this moment. It was because of Hawkmoon that I have suffered so. If he is to die, at least give me the pleasure of despatching him! I'll do what you wanted me to do in the first place. I see now that I have borne many ordeals for the sake of one who is, indeed, my enemy. Aye—let me kill him. Then I shall die. And I shall have died avenged."

The pain had plainly turned Count Brass mad. His yellow eyes rolled. His lips twisted back to reveal ivory teeth. "I shall have died avenged!"

Taragorm was surprised. "This is more than I hoped for. Our faith in you, Count Brass, was justified, after all." Taragorm's voice was gleeful as he took the brass-hilted broadsword from the mantis-guard and handed it to Count Brass.

Count Brass took his sword in both his great hands. His eyes narrowed as he turned to look at Hawkmoon.

"I shall feel better, taking an

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enemy with me," said Count Brass.

And he raised the long sword above his head. And his brass armour picked up the light from the brands and made his whole head and his whole body shine as if with fire.

And Hawkmoon peered into those yellow eyes and knew that he saw death there.

CHAPTER FOUR
A Great Wind Blowing

But it was not his own death that Hawkmoon saw.

It was Taragorm's death.

In an instant Count Brass had shifted his stance, shouted to Hawkmoon to take the guards, and brought the massive sword down upon the ornate clock mask.

There came a howl from below as the crowd understood what was happening. Beast-masks tossed from side to side as the Dark Empire creatures began to climb the steps of the ziggurat.

Kalan cried out from above. Hawkmoon, reversing his sword swiftly, swept it round to knock the flame-lances from the hands of the guards. They fell back. Kalan's voice continued to wail hysterically from the pyramid. "Fools! Fools!"

Taragorm was staggering. It was evidently Taragorm who controlled the white fire, for it flickered around Count Brass as he raised his sword for a second blow. Taragorm's clock was split, the hands buckled, but the head beneath was evidently still intact.

The sword smashed into the ruined mask and the two sides fell away.

And there was revealed a head far smaller, in proportion, than the body on which it sat. A round, ugly head—the head of something which might have thrived during the Tragic Millenium.

And then that tiny, round, white thing was lopped from its stalk by a sideswipe of Count Brass's sword. Taragorm was now most certainly dead.

Beasts began to clamber onto the platform from all sides.

Count Brass roared with battle-joy as his sword took lives, as blood splashed in the flame-light, as men screamed and fell.

Hawkmoon was still engaged on the far side of the ziggurat with the two mantis-guards who had drawn their own swords.

And now a great wind seemed to be blowing through the cavern, a whistling wind, a wailing wind.

Hawkmoon drove his sword point first through the eyeslit of the nearest mantis-warrior. He tugged the sword free and slashed at the other, driving the edge into the neck so hard that it smashed through the metal and severed the jugular. Now he could try to reach Count Brass.

"Count Brass!" he called. "Count Brass!"

Kalan was cackling in panic

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above. "The wind!" he cried. "The time-wind!"

But Hawkmoon ignored him. He was bent on reaching his friend's side and dying with his friend if need be.

But the wind blew still more strongly. It buffetted Hawkmoon. He found that he could barely move against it. And now beast-masked warriors of Granbretan were falling back, plunging over the sides of the ziggurat as the wind blew them, too.

Hawkmoon saw Count Brass swinging his broadsword two-handed. The count's armour still shone like the sun itself. He had planted his feet upon a pile of those he had already slain and he was roaring with gigantic good humour as beasts came at him, slashing with swords and pikes and spears, his own blade moving with the regularity with which Taragorm's pendulum had once moved.

And Hawkmoon laughed, too. This would be the way to die, if die they must. Again he fought against the wind, wondering from where it came as he struggled to reach Count Brass.

But then he was picked up by it. He struggled as the ziggurat fell away below him and the scene became smaller and smaller, the figure of Count Brass himself so tiny that he could barely be seen now—and Kalan's white pyramid seemed to shatter as he passed it and Kalan screamed as he went tumbling down towards the fight.

Hawkmoon tried to see what held him. But nothing visible held him at all. Only the wind.

What had he heard Kalan call it? The Time Wind?

Had they, then, in slaying Taragorm, released other forces of space and time—perhaps created the chaos which Kalan's and Taragorm's experiments had brought so close?

Chaos. Would he be blown forever upon this wind of time?

But no—he had left the cavern and was in Londra itself. Yet this was not the reformed Londra. This was the Londra of the old, bad days—the crazy towers and minarets, the jewelled domes, built upon both sides of the blood-red River Thayme. The wind had blown him into the past. Metal wings clashed as ornate ornithopters flew by. There seemed to be much activity in this Londra. For what did they prepare?

And again the scene shifted.

Again Hawkmoon looked down upon Londra. But now a battle raged. Explosions. Flame. The shouts of the dying. He recognised it. This was the Battle of Londra.

Down he began to tumble. Down and down until he could barely think and hardly knew who he was.

And then he was Dorian Hawkmoon, Duke von Köln, a flashing mirror helm upon his head, the Sword of the Dawn in his hand, the Red Amulet about his throat and a Black Jewel im-

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bedded in his skull.

Again he was at the Battle of Londra.

And he thought his new thoughts and his old together as he spurred his horse into the fray. And there was a great pain in his head and he knew the Black Jewel gnawed at his brain.

All about him men were fighting. The strange Legion of the Dawn, emitting its rosy aura, was driving through warriors who wore fierce wolf and vulture helms. All was confusion. Through his pain-glazed eyes Hawkmoon could hardly see what was happening. He glimpsed one or two of his Kamargian warriors. He saw two or three other mirror helms flashing in the thick of the battle. He realised that his own sword arm was rising and falling, rising and falling as he beat off the Dark Empire warriors who were on all sides of him.

"Count Brass," he murmured. "Count Brass." He remembered that he sought to be at the side of his old friend, though he hardly knew why. He saw the barbaric Warriors of the Dawn, with their painted bodies, their spiked clubs and their barbed lances decorated with tufts of dyed hair, slicing through the massed ranks of the Dark Empire warriors. He looked about him, trying to see which of those who wore the mirror helms was Count Brass.

And still the pain in his skull grew and grew. And he gasped and wished that he could tear the mirror helm free from his own head. But his hands were already occupied with fending off those warriors who pressed about him.

And then he saw something flash like gold and he knew it was the brazen hilt of Count Brass's sword and he spurred his horse through the throng.

The man in the mirror helm and the armour of brass was fighting three great Dark Empire lords. Hawkmoon saw him standing there in the mud, horseless and brave, while the three—Hound, Goat and Bull—rode down on him. He saw Count Brass swing his broadsword and cut at the legs of his opponents' horses so that Adaz Promp was thrown forward to land at Count Brass's feet and be swiftly slain. He saw Mygel Holst trying to get to his feet, his arms widespread as he begged for mercy. He saw Mygel Holst's head fly from its shoulders. Now only one of the lords remained alive, Saka Gerden in his massive Bull helm, rising to his feet and shaking his head as the mirror-mask blinded him.

Hawkmoon ploughed on, still crying out: "Count Brass! Count Brass!"

Though he knew this was a dream, a distorted memory of the Battle of Londra, he still felt that he must reach his old friend's side. But before he could reach Count Brass, he saw the count wrench off his mirror mask and face Saka Gerden bareheaded. Then the two closed.

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Hawkmoon was nearly there by now, fighting wildly with his only object being to reach Count Brass.

And then Hawkmoon saw a rider of the Order of the Goat, a spear poised in his hand, riding down on Count Brass from behind. Hawkmoon yelled, spurred his horse forward and drove the Sword of the Dawn deep into the throat of the Goat rider just as Count Brass split the skull of Saka Gerden.

Hawkmoon kicked the corpse of the Goat Rider free from its saddle and called:

"A horse for you, Count Brass."

Count Brass offered Hawkmoon a quick grin of thanks and swung up into the saddle, his mirror helm forgotten on the ground.

"Thanks!" shouted Count Brass above the din of the battle. "Now we'd best try to re-group our forces for the final assault."

His voice had a peculiar echo to it. Hawkmoon swayed in his saddle as the pain from the Black Jewel grew still more intense. He tried to reply, but he could not. He looked for Yisselda in the ranks of his own forces, but could not see her.

The horse seemed to gallop faster and faster as the battle-noise began to fade. Then he was no longer astride a horse at all. A wind blew him on. A strong, cold wind, like the wind that blew across the Kamarg.

The sky was darkening. The battle was behind him. He began to fall through the night. He saw swaying reeds where he had seen fighting men. He saw glistening lagoons and marshes. He heard the lonely bark of a marsh fox and he mistook it for Count Brass's voice.

And suddenly the wind no longer blew.

He tried to move of his own accord, but something tugged at his body. He no longer wore the mirror helm. His sword was no longer in his hand. His vision cleared as the terrible pain fled from his skull.

He lay immersed in marsh mud. It was night-time. He was sinking slowly into the greedy earth. He saw part of the body of a horse just in front of him. He reached towards it, but only one arm was free from the mud now. He heard his name being called and he mistook it for the cry of a bird.

"Yisselda," he murmured. "Oh, Yisselda!"

CHAPTER FIVE
Something of a Dream

He felt as if he had already died. Fantasies and memories became confused as he waited for the marsh to swallow him. Faces appeared before him. He saw the face of Count Brass which shifted from relative youth to relative age even as he watched. He saw the face of Oladahn of the Bulgar Mountains. He saw Bowgentle

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and he saw D'Averc. He saw Yisselda. He saw Kalan of Vitall and Taragorm of the Palace of Time. Beast faces loomed on all sides. He saw Rinal of the Wraith-folk, Orland Fank of the Runestaff and his brother The Warrior in Jet and Gold. He saw Yisselda again. But weren't there other faces, too? Children's faces. Why did he not see them? And why did he confuse them with the face of Count Brass? Count Brass as a child? He had not known him then. He had not been born then.

Count Brass's face was concerned. It opened its lips. It spoke.

"Is that you, young Hawkmoon?"

"Aye, Count Brass. It is Hawkmoon. Shall we die together?"

He smiled at the vision.

"He still raves," said a sad voice which was not that of Count Brass. "I am sorry, my lord. I should have tried to stop him."

Hawkmoon recognised the voice of Captain Josef Vedla.

"Captain Vedla? Have you come to pull me from the marsh for a second time?"

A rope fell near Hawkmoon's free hand. Automatically he passed his wrist through the loop. Someone began to pull at the rope. Slowly he was tugged free of the marsh.

His head was still aching, as if the Black Jewel had never been removed. But the ache was fading now and his brain was clearing. Why should he be reliving what was, after all, a fairly mundane incident in his life?—though he had come very close to death.

"Yisselda?" He looked for her face amongst those bending over him. But his fantasy remained. He still saw Count Brass, surrounded by his old Kamargian soldiers. There was no woman here at all.

"Yisselda?" he said again.

Count Brass said softly. "Come, lad, we'll take you back to Castle Brass."

Hawkmoon felt himself lifted in the count's massive arms and carried to a waiting horse.

"Can you ride yourself?" Count Brass asked.

"Aye." Hawkmoon clambered into the saddle of the horned stallion and straightened his back, swaying slightly as his feet sought the stirrups. He smiled. "Are you a ghost still, Count Brass? Or have you truly been restored to life? I said I would give anything for you to be brought back to us."

"Restored to life? You should know that I am not dead!" Count Brass laughed. "Are these fresh terrors come to haunt you, Hawkmoon?"

"You did not die at Londra?"

"Thanks to you, aye. You saved my life. If that Goat rider had got his spear into me, the chances are I'd be dead now."

Hawkmoon smiled to himself. "So events can be changed. And without repercussion, it seems. But where are Kalan and Taragorm now? And the others

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. . ." He turned to Count Brass as they rode together along the familiar marsh trails. "And Bowgentle, and Oladahn, and D'Averc?"

Count Brass frowned. "Dead these five years. Do you not remember? Poor lad, we all suffered after the Battle of Londra." He cleared his throat. "We lost much in our service of the Runestaff. And you lost your sanity."

"My sanity?"

The lights of Aigues-Mortes were coming in sight. Hawkmoon could see the outline of Castle Brass on the hill.

Again Count Brass cleared his throat. Hawkmoon stared at him. "My sanity, Count Brass?"

"I should not have mentioned it. We'll soon be home." Count Brass would not meet his gaze.

They rode through the gates of the town and began to ascend the winding streets. Some of the soldiers rode their horses in other directions as they neared the castle, for they had quarters in the town itself.

"Goodnight to you!" called Captain Vedla.

Soon only Count Brass and Hawkmoon were left. They entered the courtyard of the castle and dismounted.

The hall of the castle looked little different from when Hawkmoon had last seen it. Yet it had an empty feel to it.

"Is Yisselda sleeping?" Hawkmoon asked.

"Aye," said Count Brass wearily. "Sleeping."

Hawkmoon looked down at his mud-caked clothes. He no longer wore armour. "I'd best bathe and get to bed myself," he said. He looked hard at Count Brass and then he smiled. "I thought you slain, you know, at the Battle of Londra."

"Aye," said Count Brass in the same troubled voice. "I know. But now you know I'm no ghost, eh?"

"Just so!" Hawkmoon laughed with joy. "Kalan's schemes served us much better than they served him, eh?"

Count Brass frowned. "I suppose so," he said uncertainly, as if he was not sure what Hawkmoon meant.

"Yet he escaped," Hawkmoon went on. "We could have trouble from him again."

"Escaped? No. He committed suicide after taking that jewel from your head. That is what disturbed your brains so much."

Hawkmoon began to feel afraid.

"You remember nothing of our most recent adventures, then?" He moved to where Count Brass warmed himself at the fire.

"Adventures? You mean the marsh? You rode off in a trance, mumbling something of having seen me out there. Vedla saw you leave and came to warn me. That is why we went in search of you and just managed to find you before you died . . ."

Hawkmoon stared hard at Count Brass and then he turned away. Had he dreamed all the

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rest? Had he truly been mad?

"How long have I—have I been in this trance you mention, Count Brass?"

"Why, since Londra. You seemed rational enough for a little while after the jewel was removed. But then you began to speak of Yisselda as if she still lived. And there were other references to some you thought dead—such as myself. It is not surprising that you should have suffered such strain, for the jewel was . . ."

"Yisselda!" Hawkmoon cried out in sudden grief. "You say she is dead?"

"Aye—at the Battle of Londra, fighting as well as any other warrior—she went down . . ."

"But the children—the children . . ." Hawkmoon struggled to remember the names of his children. "What were they called? I cannot quite recall . . ."

Count Brass sighed a deep sigh and put his gauntletted hand on Hawkmoon's shoulder. "You spoke of children, too. But there were no children. How could there be?"

"No children."

Hawkmoon felt strangely empty. He strove to remind himself of something he had said quite recently. *"I would give anything if Count Brass could live again . . ."*

And now Count Brass lived again and his love, his beautiful Yisselda, his children, they were gone to limbo—they had never existed in all those five years since the Battle of Londra.

"You seem more rational," said Count Brass. "I had begun to hope that your brain was healing. Now, perhaps, it has healed."

"Healed?" The word was a mockery. Hawkmoon turned again to confront his old friend. "Have all in Castle Brass—in the whole Kamarg—thought me mad?"

"Madness might be too strong a word," said Count Brass gruffly. "You were in a kind of trance, as if you dreamed of events slightly different to those which were actually taking place . . . That is the best way I can describe it. If Bowgentle were here, perhaps he could have explained it better. Perhaps he could have helped you more than we could." The count in brass shook his heavy, red head. "I do not know, Hawkmoon."

"And now I am sane," said Hawkmoon bitterly.

"Aye, it seems so."

"Then perhaps my madness was preferable to this reality." Hawkmoon walked heavily towards the stairs. "Oh, this is so hard to bear."

Surely it could not all have been a graphic dream. Surely Yisselda had lived and the children had lived?

But already the memories were fading, as a dream fades. At the foot of the stairs he turned again to where Count Brass still stood, looking into the fire, his old head heavy and sad.

"We live—you and I? And our

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friends are dead. Your daughter is dead. You were right, Count Brass—much was lost at the Battle of Londra. Your grandchildren were lost, also."

"Aye," said Count Brass almost inaudibly. "The future was lost, you could say."

EPILOGUE

NEARLY SEVEN YEARS had passed since the great Battle of Londra, when the power of the Dark Empire had been broken. And much had taken place in those seven years. For five of them Dorian Hawkmoon, Duke of Köln, had suffered the tragedy of madness. Even now, two years since he had recovered, he was not the same man who had ridden so bravely on the Runestaff's business. He had become grim, withdrawn and lonely. Even his old friend, Count Brass, the only other survivor of the conflict, hardly knew him now.

"It is the loss of his companions—the loss of his Yisselda," whispered the sympathetic townspeople of the restored Aigues-Mortes. And they would pity Dorian Hawkmoon as he rode, alone, through the town and out of the gates and across the wide Kamarg, across the marshlands where the giant scarlet flamingoes wheeled and the white bulls galloped.

And Dorian Hawkmoon would ride to a small hill which rose from the middle of the marsh and he would dismount and lead his horse up to the top where stood the ruin of an ancient church, built before the onset of the Tragic Millenium.

And he would look out across the waving reeds and the rippling lagoons as the mistral keened and its melancholy voice would echo the misery in his eyes.

And he would try to recall a dream.

A dream of Yisselda and two children whose names he could not remember. Had they ever had names in his dream?

A foolish dream, of what might have been, if Yisselda had survived the Battle of Londra.

And sometimes, when the sun began to set across the broad marshlands and the rain begin to fall, perhaps, into the lagoons, he would stand upon the highest part of the ruin and raise his arms out to the ragged clouds which raced across the darkening sky and call her name into the wind.

"Yisselda! Yisselda!"

And his cry would be taken up by the birds which sailed upon that wind.

"Yisselda!"

And later Hawkmoon would lower his head and he would weep and he would wonder why he still felt, in spite of all the evident truth, that he might one day find his lost love again.

Why did he wonder if there were still some place—some other Earth perhaps—where the dead

(cont. on page 119)

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Editorial (cont. from page 5)

from context, of course (although it is the complete paragraph), but it seems to capture the flavor of the man's thinking.

Now FANTASTIC publishes fantasy, and Norman's Gor books *are* (it says here) fantasy, and upon occasion I've received letters from some of you inquiring as to why none of the Gor stories have appeared here.

I try to maintain a broad and open mind—and I've tried to publish as broad a spectrum of fantasy as possible here. But I can state categorically that you will never see anything by John Norman here—not if it in any respect resembles his previously published work.

Put bluntly, I regard the Gor books—and *Imaginative Sex*—as pornography. And I do not believe pornography has any place within these pages.

Now, in saying that, I'm sure I've opened myself for all nature of riposts, at least one of which will be, "But, Ted—you've published porn in your magazines before! You've even published letters of complaint about it!" (In fact, you'll find one such letter in this issue.)

Wrong. What I *have* published here in the past has been works of erotic realism, or works in which "four-letter words" appeared, usually as part of dialogue. I have also published some fairly violent stories. But the point of these stories was not to arouse the reader sexually, nor to cater to male sexist fantasies about nubile and willing slave-maidens, "delicious little things," "goods," or the like.

I am aware—and the sales of Norman's books confirm this—that a large market exists for bondage/discipline material. Most of it, however, is sold in sleezy stores, in celophane wrappers, for $5.00 to $10.00 a throw and does not pretend to be aimed primarily at the fantastic-fiction fan. Such material appeals for the most part to unfortunate people whose sense of personal worth is so low that they require either humiliation at the hands of their sexual partners or domination over them in order to become sexually aroused to climax. Such people are incapable of responding to a partner as a lover, as equals, neither superior nor inferior. They are sick, emotionally, and their sickness is more basic than the modes they chose for sexual release.

Material like that which I've quoted exploits this sickness, and may be an outgrowth of it; the paranoia in Norman's view of psychotherapy and psychotherapists is revealing.

Pornography may—and probably does—serve a useful function: it allows its readers vicarious outlets for their fantasies; it keeps the sadists and the masochists off the streets. (Not all pornography is oriented in this direction, of course, but it seems to be true that the trend is away from the "average," heterosexual, encounters in present day pornography.) But pornography is a lowest-common-denominator form: since its purpose is functional and not artistic (it exists solely for the purpose of sexual arousal—not for insight into human sexuality), it is for the most part written as quickly as possible and as poorly as possible. The distinction between pornography and erotic realism lies precisely here: a work of erotic realism (and I must call attention to the word *realism* in the phrase "erotic realism") deals with realistic sexual encounters between people, usually with insight into the human condition

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and an awareness of how sexuality colors people's lives and personalities. Pornography does not: it is peopled with two-dimensional stereotypes, most of whom exist solely to copulate as often and in as many ways as the author of such works can devise.

Perhaps I should have dismissed the Gor books as garbage and not dignified them with the term pornography, but this is not a formal review, and in my opinion they are pornography precisely because they pander to unrealistic attitudes and emotionally disturbed fantasies. In them, as in pornography, the characters are cardboard, and if the sex is not four-letter-word-explicit, the willingness of the captive women (attractive, one and all) to go into heat as soon as they are dominated by a male is all too familiar a stereotype of pornography. So also is the concept of a beautiful woman as a creature to be whipped into submission, which—of course!—she will end up enjoying.

Well, you'll never see it here. That's a promise.

SPEAKING OF FEMALE CREATURES, I have in hand a letter from Richard A. Lupoff, about one of this magazine's most endearing characters, female or otherwise, Ova Hamlet. Lupoff writes:

Dear Ted,

I was slightly puzzled as to why you, an editor, should send a manuscript to me, an author. Once I saw the title ["The Wedding of Ova Hamlet"], of course, everything became clear. Ova Hamlet chooses to communicate with your magazine through me rather than directly, and since she appears as the central character of this story, it was a proper and courteous act on your part to let her see the manuscript prior to publication.

Strangely enough, Ova hasn't been seen around her usual haunts (the dingier bars of metropolitan Oakland) of late. Still, out of friendship for you and a sense of responsibility for Ova, I cruised the entire San Francisco Bay Area in my Pierce-Arrow Phaeton, paying particular attention to the drunk-tanks, missionary soup-kitchens and free flop-houses of the various communities hereabouts.

Finally I found the old dear snoring innocently away on the sidewalk in front of the Ace of Spades Card Room and Ribbery in Emeryville, one of the choicest industrial suburbs in the area. I shovelled her into the *tonneau* of the Pierce-Arrow, brought her to my house, and brewed up a steaming, aroma-delicious pot full of Econo-Master Instant Coffee Substitute, and brought her around to a state as close to alert sobriety as I guess the lady is capable of any more.

She lay back in my Lay-Z-Lay-D Recliner with Addison Steele II's manuscript in one hand and the cup of Econo-Master in the other while I put on a stack of precious Guy Lombardo wax cylinders. She kept reading and sobbing out things like "Oh, Dunc," and "My poor little skunk-face," or something like that.

I also noticed that she managed to locate a pint of Old Cobweb somewhere under her filthy, tattered dress, and kept spiking her Econo-Master with it as she read.

When she finished she turned her rheumy pale eyes toward me and said "It's true, Dickie-baby, every effing word of it! Ida know who this b*st*rd Steele is, but he's got every detail exactly right, goddamit! Say, ya got any Jimmy 'Dancing Shoes' Palmer

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sides there? I'm getting a little bit weary of the sublime Lombardo."

After that the party got a little bit, shall we say, "intimate," Ted. I know I can trust your perceptiveness to figure out the rest—and your discretion not to say anything about it among company who might not understand.

So there you go, Ted. Ova says to publish with her blessing. She says, "I consider this story to be a tribute to the memory of a very great man (even if he wasn't much of a f*ck)."

I'm not sure who she's referring to by that. Sir Duncan? Rupert Linwood? T? Or maybe somebody else altogether, you can never tell what's going on in the dubious mind of Ova Hamlet.

But I have to tell you that as she left my house (she borrowed my kid's skateboard and pushed off—it's all downhill from here to Emeryville) she muttered something under her breath about having a new story of her own in the works. I think that the munificent paychecks that she gets from the publishers of FANTASTIC are the entire basis of Ova's luxurious standard of living.

Yours most sincerely,

/Dick/
Richard A. Lupoff

With this letter, Lupoff returned to me the copy I'd sent him of "The Wedding of Ova Hamlet" by Addison Steele II. It was stained with tears, would-be-coffee rings, and something unmentionable; it stank of cheap booze. Fortunately, it was only a xerox copy of the original, which had not left our offices. You'll have an opportunity to read it here, next issue.

—TED WHITE

Fantasy Books (cont. from page 71)

tryside lingering in the past (Hunterdon County, New Jersey), a scholarly observer (he's writing a history of the Gothic novel), an atmosphere of spectral uneasiness built bit by seemingly trifling bit, lots of cats, and a novel embodiment of cosmic dread. A real beauty, fresh yet truly Lovecraftian.

FRITZ LEIBER

Count Brass (cont. from page 116)

still lived? Surely such an obsession showed that there was a trace of madness left in his skull?

Then he would sigh and arrange his features so that none who saw him would know that he had mourned and he would climb upon his horse and, as the dusk fell, ride back to Castle Brass where his old friend waited for him.

Where Count Brass waited for him.

Thus ends the first of the Chronicles of Castle Brass

—MICHAEL MOORCOCK

ON SALE IN SEPTEMBER AMAZING—JUNE 26th
TO GAIN A DREAM, BY WILLIAM ROTSLER, WHAT IS HAPPENING TO SARAH ANNE LAWRENCE? by TED WHITE, DELIVERYMAN by RICHARD E. PECK, an outstanding science article by **GREG BENFORD,** and many other new stories and features.

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...According to You

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet, and addressed to According To You, *Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 22046.*

Dear Ted,

I picked up the November FANTASTIC after missing a few issues. After reading it, I went back and looked over my back issues for the past couple of years. It seems to me that the magazine is changing. Not just FANTASTIC, but AMAZING too (the two are pretty much the same; more Ted White than anything else). What are the changes, and are they for the better, or worse?

To begin with, the fiction is tremendously better. With the publication of Thomas Burnett Swann's "Will-O-The-Wisp," you now have three strong contenders for a Hugo nomination in 1975, the other two being Adliss's *Frankenstein Unbound* and Richard Snead's "The Kozmic Kid." This compares with a very poor showing last year, when no story from either magazine got a Hugo nomination, and only one, Eklund's "Moby, Too", was included in any best-of-the-year anthology.

The short fiction in the November issue was better than I was used to seeing in FANTASTIC. Grant Carrington's "Half Past the Dragon" was one of the funniest science fiction stories in recent years. "A Song on the Rising Wind" by R. Faraday Nelson—what can I say? Stories like this used to be found only in *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, but now they're showing up in FANTASTIC. Keep it up. Also, my eternal thanks to Ova Hamlet/Richard Lupoff for "Grebzlam's Game", which has to be the ultimate Malzberg parody.

So there have been good changes in in AMAZING/FANTASTIC. But. . .

Well, how about the editorials? Or should I say, the lack of them. Frankly, it seems to me that the entire editorial space has been given over to a column that gives advice to beginning writers; advice that anybody who is half-way serious about writing should already know (there are many excellant books and magazines that cover this subject). Remember the good old days, the fight about how much to charge for convention membership, the way Ted tore apart the *Newsweek* article about science fiction, remember?

Another change, or rather the lack of it, hurts FANTASTIC. It is L. Sprague deCamp's column, *Literary Swordsmen and Sorcerers*. I looked over the letter columns of all the back issues I could lay my hands on, and in them I could find not a single letter saying, "Dear Ted, I really love L. Sprague DeCamp's column." How about replacing it with a book review?

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You know what book reviews are, don't you Ted? All the other Science fiction magazines have them. Is it some pathological fear of them you have, like maybe at an early age you were frightened by Damon Knight?

One other thing, and this isn't your fault. The letter column really sucks. O, where are the letterhacks of yesteryear? With the exception of that guy from Vermont, I forget his name, nobody has written a good letter so far this year. Even Harlan Ellison turned in a miserable effort.

So there have been changes, some good, some bad. The good ones I'm grateful for, and as for the others, well, they can be changed if we (yeah, *we*, letter-freaks) work on them.

And after all this I almost forgot to say that the art is vastly improved. Joe Staton and Jeff Jones are doing dynamite work.

DAVID TAGGART
Chandler Road
White River Jct.,

Your letter—written last fall—just surfaced tardily in our files, David. But, to answer your questions: 1. My editorials are often a response to questions or problems raised by a portion of the readership. When the same questions pop up many times in letters asking for personal reply, I devote an editorial (or at least space in this column) to them in the hope that by so doing I can cut back on the individual replies, which take up a lot of my time. A sizable number of this magazine's readers want to write fiction for it, and inasmuch as the best fiction we receive from previously unpublished writers comes from our own audience (rather than from unpublished writers who found us in a marketplace listing in a writer's magazine), it makes sense to address myself occasionally to their questions and problems. Hopefully, my editorials of last year will suffice a while. . .until we've had a readership turnover. 2. That brings us to your question about the letterhacks of yesteryear. Where are they? Apparently elsewhere. This is an ongoing phenomenon: during the six years since I revied this column, we've had a steady turnover in letterwriters. Some have gone on to distinguish themselves in other aspects of fandom, some even becoming professional writers (like Lisa Tuttle). Others have simply disappeared, to unknown pursuits. 3. As for Sprague's quasi-column, it continues when and if he writes it. At present I have on hand two more (beside the one in this issue); the last is a two-parter on Tolkien. Since the column is irregular, I plan to space out future instalments of Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers: *the next will be in the December issue and the Tolkien two-parter will begin in the April, 1976, issue. We have received a number of favorable comments on the column since its inception in our June, 1971, issue—and we get quite a few complaints when it is absent for any length of time. As for book reviews, I feel Fritz Leiber handles these more than adequately. However, your line, "all the other science fiction magazines have them," betrays you.* FANTASTIC *is not like "all the other science fiction magazines," if it is in fact a* science fiction *magazine at all. We prefer to lead, rather than follow. What you find here (and in* AMAZING*) you'll find nowhere else.* –TW

Dear Ted,

You would not *believe* the trouble I

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had getting ahold of the February FANTASTIC. The local bookseller's—the only one that carries the prozines—that usually gets magazines in on Wednesdays, got them in on a Monday last month because of Thanksgiving. I didn't know that. So I arrived at the store two days after the zines were put on the stands. And in the science fiction hungry community in which I live, that usually means there aren't any left. No FANTASTIC. I managed to grab the very last copy of AMAZING. And then I threw a temper tantrum. I made the poor clerks search through every one of the boxes of magazines they had ready to send back to the distributor. No luck. I then tried to get someone to go down to Ludington and see if he could get it there. No deal. So I finally gave up and sent a dollar off to the publisher's. *Sigh* (No, don't tell me to subscribe. Who can come up with that much spendable money all at once?)

When I took the issue out of the envelope, the first thing that struck me was that gorgeous Stephen Fabian cover. Beautiful.

The table of contents could almost be a fanzine's—with Juanita Coulson, Mike Glicksohn/Dubious, Alpajuri, Bruce D Arthurs. . .and a con report in your editorial besides!

The food problem at Discon spread farther than just throughout the hotel. Those of us who had very little money to spend on such a luxury as *eating* found the ideal place from which to purchase our occasional meals in a small delicatessen across the street from the hotel. Unfortunately, however, the hotel had neglected to inform them there was to be a convention that weekend—especially not one made up of 5000+ hungry people all looking for a cheap place to eat—and they were low on supplies. By Saturday they were reduced to serving corned-beef-on-bagel sandwiches.

My major complaint about Discon was its size, which made it difficult to meet people, and harder still to relocate those you *had* met. The size of worldcons has become a major topic for discussion and has many fans (particularly those in Kansas City) in a quandry as to what to do about them. Suggestions made include banning all non-science fiction programming (eg *Star Trek*), discontinuing at-the-door memberships, and keeping comic books from the hucksters' room. Though these *might* help curb the oversized worldcon attendance, there are valid objections to each, and all the pros and cons must be carefully weighed. But things simply *cannot* go on as they have been. With so many people, there is chaos and confusion and not *all* of this is fun.

You were touched by a bit of this yourself, Ted: While putting copies of AMAZING and FANTASTIC out on the freebie table, you looked up and saw my nametag and said something like, "I hope you're having a better time at this worldcon than you did at the last one." And I said something like, "Yes, I'm having a great time." The next day, in an elevator, you again noticed my nametag and said, "I hope you're having a better time at this worldcon than you did at the last one." And I said, "Yes, I'm having a great time."

This was my first chance to see Juanita Coulson's fiction, but I was not surprised that I enjoyed it as much as her other writing that I've seen, and that's no small praise.

"Dissenting" has more than "a touch of humor." I laughed myself sil-

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ly. So Glicksohn has finally sold out and joined the ranks of the filthy pros. Tsk, tsk.

And the same to Bruce Arthurs. "Captain Nucleus" was great. But what other sf writer would style a "Space Forces" after the army instead of the navy—it should have been *Admiral* Smasher, and Nucleus should have become an *ensign*, not a sergeant—who else but Specialist 5th Class Bruce D Arthurs?

Whadaya tryin' to do, White, start the New Wave Controversy up again? *Two* stories about it in one issue?!

J Wayne Sadler should be informed that a review is the result of its writer's *personal* tastes and opinions. There is no reason why two reviewers must or should agree. The trick is to find a reviewer whose tastes coincide with your own and use him as your guide. A good reviewer will give you his reaction to a work based on his own particular values and tell you what those values are. It is the reader who must take it from there, and decide whether or not he agree's with the reviewer's values. Or do you want all your decisions made for you?

All in all, this was one of the best issues of FANTASTIC I've seen (even disregarding my fannish prejudices). Let's have more like it!

LEAH A ZELDES
21961 Parklawn
Oak Park, MI 48237

Well, I'm certainly glad you enjoyed your second worldcon better than you did your first. I don't recall asking the same question of you twice—but then, I wouldn't, would I? Obviously the strain (or something) was getting to me by the time I saw you in the elevator. . .—TW

Sir:

I must protest Ian McEwan's "Solid Geometry" in the February *Fantastic*. This wretched obscenity spoiled an otherwise good (though not great) issue. The central plot was silly enough, but that pickled penis business (and the rest) was nothing but dirt for dirt's sake. The nastiness was further compounded by Richard Olsen's unpleasant illustration. I want to be entertained not nauseated, thank you.

Moreover, I am against the wholesale use of foul language in fiction. A case might be made for four-letter words in naturalistic fiction, but there is no excuse for its use in fantasy. It ruined the Alpajpuri piece; at one moment he's waxing lyrical and the next he's using gutter words like ass and shit, completely destroying the effect. The great fantasy writers of the past took pains to make their language elegant and refined; I suggest they knew what they were doing.

An editor should reject the sophomoric and the gross. The fantasy reader is looking for a vacation from reality; he is not looking for an emetic.

R. PACELLO
Toms River, New Jersey

Obviously I disagree with you. I found no "dirt for dirt's sake" in "Solid Geometry," but equally obviously we do not agree on what makes "dirt" in the first place. Perhaps (pace, *my editorial this issue) you might prefer the Tarnsman for Gor novels if you're looking for a vacation from reality. . .*—TW

Dear Ted,

The April FANTASTIC just came out, with your new subtitle: "Sword & Sorcery and Fantasy Stories". Well,

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to tell the truth, I didn't notice it until you called my attention to it in your editorial. FANTASTIC is an old friend and I no longer bother to look at the description of the ingredients. But I think the change is a wise one, and I wish you a lot of luck with it.

That's not entirely a platitude, since I have some experience with your sales as co-owner of a s-f & comic-book specialty bookshop & newsstand in a city of 300,000 population, with a large college clientele. During last year I noted that when the cover graphics on AMAZING and FANTASTIC were similar, sales were similar. Whenever FANTASTIC featured a strongly sword-&-sorcery cover, as on the July 1974 or February 1975 issues, those issues outsold AMAZING by a considerable margin; and this April FANTASTIC is already selling quite well. This certainly indicates that, among our customers at least, your emphasis on sword-&-sorcery is a smart move. I think that Steve Fabian's covers on the Feb. & Apr. FANTASTICs have definitely helped, too. The monochromatic backgrounds—pink on Feb.; green on Apr.—are real eye-catchers, and once the newsstand-browser's eye is caught, there's a scene promising human interest and action to hook him. Frankly, experience has shown that these sell better than abstractions, or beautiful but cold astronomical paintings. Keep at it.

It's always a delight to see the Mouser and Fafhrd back again, and with so many old acquaintances with them this time. The story was really too short, though. Hardly anyone, including the stars, had more than walk-on scenes. "Under the Thumbs of the Gods" would make a nice interlude between a couple of the Mouser and Fafhrd's *real* adventures, like *The Lords of Quarmall* or "The Snow Women". Is there any chance of your getting one of these longer, more solid dramas from Leiber? [*Fritz?*—TW]

"Young Nurse Nebuchadnezzar" doesn't read as much like Dick Lupoff parodying Ron Hubbard as it does Dick Lupoff parodying Ron Goulart parodying Ron Hubbard. Since Hubbard's original Ole Doc Methuselah stories were already parodies—or so tongue-in-cheek as to be indistinguishable from parodies—is it really worth stretching the froth out this far?

By the way, there's a slight error in your editorial. In your list of defunct fantasy magazines of the past, you mentioned *Coven 13*, which you said "changed publishers. . .and died a lingering death as *Witchcraft & Sorcery*". The death is certainly lingering, but it's not terminal yet. Publisher William Crawford lost national distribution due to poor sales with his 6th (May 1971) issue, but he's doggedly refused to admit defeat and is still publishing a new issue whenever funds permit and selling it directly by mail. *Witchcraft & Sorcery* #10 was just published in November 1974, and contains fiction by David Gerrold, Emil Petaja, R. A. Lafferty, Ross Rocklynne, and Robert E. Howard, among others, plus a Jeff Jones cover. (The REH is one of the seemingly endless chain of never-before-printed manuscripts from Howard's old trunk.) Readers who aren't within easy distance of the few s-f specialty bookshops in the country who stock it can get it by writing directly to the publisher, Fantasy Publishing Co., Inc., 1855 West Main Street, Alhambra, California 91801. The cover price is $1.00; I don't know how

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many back issues may be still available. There are few enough fantasy magazines in existence today that a venture like *W&S* deserves to be supported. It's particularly refreshing to see a publisher who refuses to give up, despite monumental apathy from the national distributors.

I've just heard some news that I think you should report to your readers at once. Linda Bushyager's *Karass* reports that the 1976 World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in Kansas City, Missouri, is so afraid of being flooded by last-minute at-the-door joiners that it's going to discourage them by charging a $50.00 at-the-door membership price! The pro- and con merits of this can be, and doubtlessly will be, debated at length later; at the moment, s-f readers should be notified of this as soon as possible so that they can still join before the rates begin skyrocketing. The current attending membership rate is $6.00 and the supporting rate is $4.00, payable to Mid AmeriCon, P. O. Box 221, Kansas City, Missouri 64141. The Con Committee might be interested in getting the s-f community's opinion of this policy, too. I don't like overly-crowded Worldcons any more than the next fan, but I also don't like the idea of effectively freezing out anyone who seriously wants to attend the s-f world's major annual event.

FRED PATTEN
11863 W. Jefferson Blvd., apt. 1
Culver City, Ca. 90230

Thanks for the update on Witchcraft & Sorcery; *I had assumed its death after hearing nothing of it for more than a year. As for Mid AmeriCon's membership rates, according to their second Progress Report the $6.00 fee will be good only until May 1, 1975—or a little before this issue goes on sale. After May first the price for an attending membership will be $10.00, and supporting (non-attending) memberships will be $5.00. However, the increases don't stop there. On September 1, 1975, the rates will go up to $15.00 and $5.00; on January 1, 1976, to $20.00 and $6.00; on May 1, 1976 to $25.00 and $6.00; and from August first, 1976 through the convention itself (Labor Day weekend, 1976) $50.00 to attend and $6.00 if not attending. While I can understand the reasoning involved, I do not support it. It severely penalizes those who become able to attend only at the last moment, and those who are newcomers to science fiction and/or fandom and who learn about this, the "major event" in science fiction, too late to take advantage of lower prices. I wrote to the Convention Committee to suggest that if they must retain the $50.00 at-the-door fee they might make the early increases lower and the late increases steeper; thus far my letter has not been answered (but with over a thousand members by the close of 1974, the Committee obviously already had its hands full). Upon reconsideration, I believe a worldcon committee concerned about limiting attendance should not do so by charging outrageously steep fees at the door, but should otherwise limit membership by announcing that a finite number of advance memberships (say 4,500) would be sold, with none available by mail after that number had been sold, but that an additional number (say 500) would be available on a first-come, first-served, basis at the door. My figures are arbitrary; whatever number a committee decided for its limit would suffice if the proportion remained about as I put it.*

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This would have definite advantages for the committee: they would know the precise number of membership cards, progress reports, etc., to print, and the precise number of attendees to plan upon in dealing with the hotel(s) in question. Yet, by saving a specific number of memberships for sale at the door, provision could be made for late-joiners, etc., without turning the convention into a closed-door affair. It would, again, allow specific planning in terms of numbers of attendees and materials. The Kansas City plan is very chancy—there is no telling whether they'll sell many or only a very few of their $50.00 memberships, and no way of knowing until the convention is over. Thus, they must make provision for the possibility of selling many such memberships—and have materials such as program books, blank membership cards, etc., printed and available, as well as a staff to sell them—even if it turns out they sell only three memberships at that price. Further, if sales of the $50.00 memberships are significant in number (although obviously the price is intended to discourage the sale of such memberships), Kansas City will have windfall profits to deal with—and the Worldcon is avowedly "non-profit". Like all "discourage sales by raising the price" plans—like the boost in gasoline prices advocated by President Ford—those with little money to spare are more discriminated against than those who can meet any price. Inasmuch as most stf fans are traditionally students or recently graduated from school, and we have entered into a job-scarce recession, I cannot approve of a plan like MidAmeriCon's, no matter how well-intended.—TW

Dear Ted,

For the first time (ever) I finished the latest issue of FANTASTIC (April) within 48 hours of receiving it, an occasion in honor of which I dedicate this letter. I have some praise and some anti-praise to lay on you, namely:

The artwork. With the recent addition of Stephen Fabian, and continuing with Richard Olsen, J. Michael Nally, Jeff Jones, et al, you are giving me prime icing on a cake that is already tasty. Bravo.

The stories. Sometimes they're damn good, othertimes they're unfathomable. I have in mind the Malzberg and Montana mysteries, wherein it seems that the authors were content to get paid for 50% of the story, while savoring the remaining 50% in the comfortable recesses of their private thoughts. Malzberg is just playing cheap tricks by leading the reader on with allusions to facts withheld, facts that are implied as being central to the meaning of the story—and which remain unrevealed. So *why* am I supposed to believe Malzberg when he tells me these facts are so important, or at least *alludes* to their importance? Likewise with the "Interstate 15". Lacking plot, characterization, theme, and (almost) style, I can barely call it a story. But the rest were redeeming: Rocklynne, Dann, & Hamlet, for example. Long fooled around too much with unresolved implications for my taste. Sending the kid off to camp is going to thwart the recurring apparitions? You've got to be kidding.

Star Trek (I can already hear the groans). I, too, recall *Men in Space*, starring William Lundigan (who he?) and running through the late 50's. It had the advantage of some respect-

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able special effects and managed to treat its subject with a straight face, unlike many episodes of *ST*. Furthermore, portions of *MiS* footage were often incorporated into some episodes of *The Outer Limits,* which was the acme of tv sf so far as I'm concerned. *ST* captured the neon glitter of 70's special effects; *TOL* captured the sense of wonder, as in so many episodes where the presence of an alien being was contrasted with a background of almost idyllic terrestrial beauty in such a way as to highlight the impact of actually encountering an *alien form of intelligence.*

Well, *TOL* wasn't everything, and *ST* was sometimes good. But the virtues of *ST* were the virtues of gaudy space opera: flashy action, melodrama, and a manichean resolution of good over evil (or, "they all lived happily ever after"). Maybe *ST* was the first resounding media success of sf, but I'm not convinced the price was worth it. Much better to watch a re-run of *The Day the Earth Stood Still.*

The editor. Thanx for the backtalk, which I count slightly higher than feedback—and far higher than *output* (e.g., Bova). I have no patience for editors that refuse to communicate; such behavior is a contradiction to the profession. You may be worse off than Avis, but 'tis better to do right than to receive a Hugo.

MIKE DUNN
903 Bellevue Place East, #301
Seattle, Washington 98102

Dear Ted:

I have just discovered FANTASTIC, and, if the April '75 issue is any indication of the quality of your magazine, I will shortly be subscribing. (Depending, of course, on whether or not I find a job in the near future.)

Actually this is a first for me for I have never written to an editor before, but after reading the letter-column, I felt that I had to write about something that has been bugging me for quite a while.

In all this ballyhooing about *Star Trek* I do not recall reading or hearing anything about a series that I believe is, minute for minute, a far superior effort than *Star Trek* ever was, and that is *Outer Limits.* Here was a show that, on an apparently limited budget, turned out programs of consistant quality. (Oh, it had its share of turkeys but not nearly as many as *ST.*) Such examples as "Nightmare", "Demon with the Glass Hand", "The Inheritors" to name a few, are far better, to my mind, than virtually any *ST* episode. I also think its anthology type format lends itself more to televised sf than an episodic format like *ST*'s. It seems as if every attempt at sf on television eventually regressed to a wearying variation on a theme, e.g., *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* and its monster-of-the-week syndrome, *Lost in Space* becoming "Lost in Mother Goose", and of course *Star Trek* with its transposed Earth cultures and the ongoing question of "Who will Kirk get his rocks off with this week?"

If sf is ever to come back to the tube I hope it reaches the standards of *Outer Limits* (and, come to think of it, the old *Twilight Zone* series too). But if the trend on the tube is anything, we'll probably wind up with a goddamned cop show made from Perry Rhodan.

Concerning your query about heroic fantasy-adventure on the tube: I don't think it will work, at least not today.

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First of all, consider the mentality and imagination of the average tv exec and tv viewer. I can't see them being stirred or impressed with what would seem to them as a bunch of large, hairy people running around with swords. In a showdown between Conan and Archie Bunker, I fear Bunker would win.

Secondly, think about the fate of stories that you are acquainted with that have shown up on the tube. The execs must feel obligated to "update, modernize or otherwise improve" stories for tv. With few exceptions, you get such things as the treatment given Lovecraft's "Pickman's Model" on *Night Gallery* or worse, that dismal *Tarzan* series.

Thirdly, I don't think that the swordplay and general mayhem would be treated successfully. Do you think they would be able to adequately portray the blizzard of human appendages and vicera that Conan leaves behind him when he enters into a melee? Not to mention the sundry nasties perpetrated on the victims of the bad guys? More than likely you'd get some hokey wacking and bashing around that looks like everybody is having great fun and no one is really getting hurt.

Fourthly (along with the above): special effects. Would the execs be willing to get the talent that would be necessary to imaginatively and believably portray the ghoulies and ghosties and various other demons that abound in sword and sorcery? The man in the monster suit just wouldn't cut it here. Someone like Ray Harryhausen would be needed.

Finally, the main characters themselves. When I think of Conan I always envision that great Frazetta cover on *Conan the Adventurer*. To my mind, it would be difficult to find a mere mortal to convincingly play such a larger-than-life character as Conan, or Elric, or Thongor.

I wish that someone would try it. I'm sure that a s&s series could be done and done well. I just don't think the tv execs would have the balls to do it. Sad but true. Alas.

Speaking of Conan, whatever became of the final book in the Conan series, *Conan of Aquilonia*? I've heard that Lancer has gone bust, but other than that, nothing. Also, where can I find more stories of Howard's Solomon Kane and Lin Carter's Kellorie? I've read "The Hills of the Dead" by Howard and the first story in the Carter series but nothing else.

KEVIN DOLIN
4348 Hannover Courts
St. Louis, Mo. 63123

Actually, this (unfortunately indeterminable) discussion of sf on tv started with a contrast drawn between Star Trek *and* Outer Limits *(in our April, 1972, issue). . . Your objection to s&s on tv is probably well-founded, and the flood of letters I received on this topic (a few of which will follow in the space available) is in total agreement with you. Now watch some canny "tv exec" prove us all wrong . . .As for* Conan of Aquilonia, *the fate of the book is still in the air, as far as I know: a victim of the problems surrounding the unfortunate demise of Lancer Books. But the four novelettes which comprise the book have all been published here and can be ordered as back issues from the publisher. They are "The Witch of the Mists" August, 1972; "Black Sphinx of Nebthu" July, 1973; "Red Moon of Zembabwei" July 1974 and "Shadows in the Skull" February, 1975.—*TW

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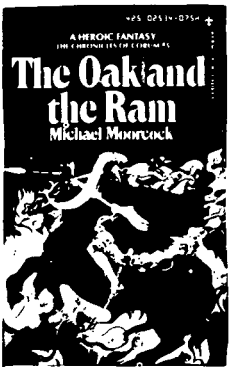

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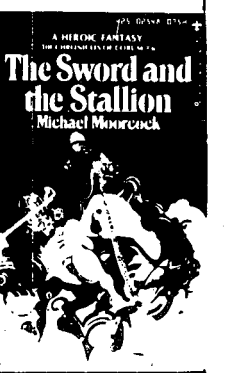

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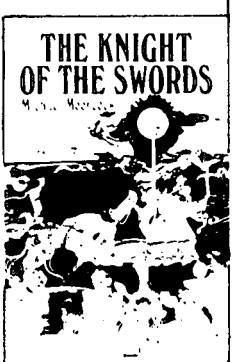

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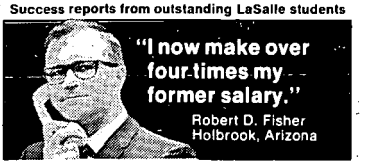

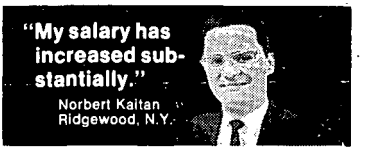

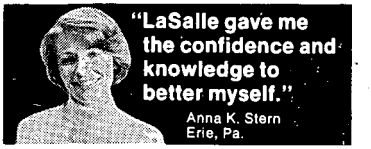

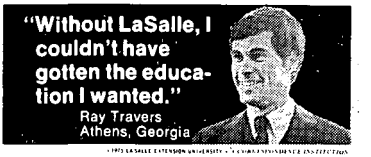

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